

Services reduced as doctors and nurses protest over lack of essential services

Provision of health services at Mt Hagen Hospital has not been as normal as it used to be during the months of April and May.

Whilst most essential services including the accidents and emergency unit were not affected, others such as the adults and children's out-patients departments were scaled down due to doctors and nurses not working full-time.

Members of the National Doctors' Association (NDA), National Nurses' Association, Community Health Workers and Allied Health Workers' Associations had decided to hold a sit-in protest over what they claimed was lack of essential services at Mt Hagen Hospital.

They also protested over the advertising of the position of Director Curative Health Services (DCHS), threatening to hold a mass resignation if the advertisement was not withdrawn.

The doctors and nurses presented a petition to the Minister for Health and HIV/AIDS, Hon. Michael Malabag who then appointed an Investigation Committee to look into the allegations.

The Committee comprising a representative each from the Attorney-General's Office as Chairperson, the National Health Department and the Public Services Commission among others took almost a month to complete its investigations and submit a report on its findings to the Minister.

The Minister upon receiving the report made a number of recommendations to the Board of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) to implement immediately including directing the CEO, Dr. James Kintwa to step aside, advertising the position of the CEO and



Nurses attending to a baby patient in the Children's Out-patient Department at Mt Hagen Hospital after returning to work.

appointing an acting CEO.

The then Chief Executive Officer, Dr. James Kintwa had brushed aside allegations by the hospital staff that some services including the operating theatre had been closed for the last eight months due to waste water leaking from the floor above it.

Dr. Kintwa said there had been problems experienced with water leaking from the top floor into the operating theatre but every time this happened, maintenance staff had been sent in to rectify the problem and the theatre had been operating from time to time and not shut down completely as claimed by the staff.

He said the WHPHA had done and would continue to do what it could to improve health services at Mt Hagen Hospital for the sake of patients.

"Basic service delivery is essential for the treatment of patients and the Authority would do everything possible to ensure these services are delivered", Dr. Kintwa said.

On the demand for the withdrawal of the advertisement for the position of DCHS which was the cause for the sit-in protest by the NDA members, Dr. Kintwa said the Management would not rescind its decision to advertise it in the two national daily newspapers.

He said it was a normal administrative process to advertise a contract position when its term neared its expiration to give enough time for the interview and selection process to be completed and an appointment made so that the services provided through that position could continue.

As there was no end to the war of words between the union members and the Management, the Secretary for Health, Mr. Pascoe Kase had sent a team comprising his deputy, Dr. Paison Dakulala as team leader and the NDA President, Dr. James Naipao and Secretary, Dr. Sam Yockopua to meet with both parties in a bid to solve the dispute.

Following the meeting, the doctors and nurses agreed to end their plan for a mass resignation and return to work but demanded that the Investigation Committee complete its findings and have the final report ready within 21 working days from Monday, 18th April 2016.

This demand was fulfilled and the final report was presented to the Health Minister who then acted on the findings and made recommendations for the WHPHA Board to implement immediately, among them the stepping down of the CEO which Dr. Kintwa took graciously and stood down on 13th May and an acting appointment made on 23rd May 2016.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Hospital issues must be resolved quickly for the sake of patients

Hello readers and welcome to the editor's column, replacing the usual Message from the Chief Executive Officer. There is no message from the CEO in this issue as the incumbent, Dr. James Kintwa has stepped aside as a result of what's been happening in the last two months.

During the months of April and May, things did not work out well at Mt Hagen Hospital as doctors and nurses staged a sit-in protest over allegations of lack of essential services at the hospital and the failure of the senior management to address them.

Provision of health services was reduced as a result of the protest. Only emergencies and other essential services were provided while the doctors and nurses waited for answers to a petition they had presented to the Minister for Health and HIV/AIDS, Hon Michael Malabag.

The petition called for among other things, immediate action to improve essential services at the hospital including the operating theatres, the removal of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority Board and the removal of the CEO and his deputy.

The doctors and nurses also demanded in a separate letter to Dr. Kintwa to withdraw the advertising of the position of Director Curative Health Services which he had advertised in the two national dailies in March, saying this was done at a wrong time

The position had been advertised because its three-year contract had expired on 23rd March 2016 and the incumbent, Dr. John Kiap had been advised that the position would be advertised because new KRAs had been added and that he was welcome to apply.

However the doctors and nurses said if the advertisement was not withdrawn within 24 hours they would stop work and have a mass resignation. This was a twist from their original demands for improved services to which Dr. Kintwa said he would not withdraw the advertisement as it was a normal administrative process to do so when a position became vacant.

He informed the public that Dr. Kiap was not terminated from the position of DCHS and that the industrial action by NDA Mt Hagen Branch had been taken purely for self-serving purposes and had nothing to do with any management or clinical issues.

He further added that the position of the WHPHA Management and Board in relation to these allegations was that they had nothing to hide from anyone and if and when the Minister for Health felt there was a need for an investigation to be conducted, the Management and Board would give their full support and co-operation.

Dr. Kintwa said the WHPHA had done and would continue to do what it could to improve health services at Mt Hagen Hospital for the sake of patients.

He said basic service delivery was essential for the treatment of patients and the Authority would do everything possible to ensure these services were delivered.

He also brushed aside allegations by hospital staff that some services including the operating theatre had been closed for the last eight months due to waste water leaking from the floor above it.

Dr. Kintwa said there had been problems experienced with water leaking from the top floor into the operating theatre but every time this happened, maintenance staff had attended to it and fixed it and the theatre had been operating and not shut down completely as claimed by staff.

He said the WHPHA Management was just as concerned as the staff to have improved services at not only the hospital but the rural health facilities as well to provide a better health service for everyone and there was no way it could turn a blind eye on such situations.

At this point there seemed to be no end to the dispute between the union members and the Management, resulting in the Secretary for Health, Mr. Pascoe Kase sending a team comprising his deputy, Dr. Paison Dakulala as team leader and the NDA President, Dr. James Naipao and Secretary, Dr. Sam Yockopua to meet with both parties in a bid to resolve the dispute.

Following the meeting, the doctors and nurses agreed to end their plan for a mass resignation and return to work but demanded that the Investigation Committee complete its findings and have the final report ready within 21 working days from Monday, 18th April 2016.

This demand was met and the final report was presented to the Health Minister who then acted on the findings and made recommendations for the WHPHA Board to implement immediately, among them the standing down of the CEO, advertising of the position of CEO and appointment of an interim CEO to manage the affairs of the organization.

The Board, in a letter to Dr. Kintwa on 12th May advised him to step down following recommendations by the Minister and he accepted the decision of the Board and stepped down on Friday, 13th May 2016.

The Board also appointed an interim CEO who took up duties on 23rd May and advertised the position three times in the two national daily newspapers which ran for a week before closing on 27th May 2016.

Dr. Kintwa said his acceptance of the Board decision was to allow for continuity of services at the hospital for the sake of the patients and he urged the doctors and nurses to also take heed of the recommendations and continue to serve our people.

"For the sake of the patients and the health of the people of Western Highlands, I strongly call on the doctors, nurses and CHWs to continue to provide services to our people that we as professionals have pledged under oath to serve", he said.

He added that any continued disregard for the Minister's directives by the doctors and nurses would only jeopardize the lives of the public.

Let us hope that our doctors and nurses do

what is right for the health of our people. After all, the issues that they have raised have been addressed by the Health Minister based on the report of the Investigation Committee and the Board is now starting to implement some of them.

The Chairman of the Board, Mr. David Guinn in a memo to all the staff of the WHPHA outlined some of the recommendations by the Minister for Health, Hon Michael Malabag.

"As all of you know a Committee of Inquiry (Col) was established by the Minister for Health, Hon Michael Malabag under Section 40 of the Provincial Health Authorities Act 2007.

"The Minister established the Committee after he had received a petition from the four Unions (doctors, nurses, CHWs and Allied Health Workers) representing clinical staff employed by the WHPHA on the Mt Hagen Hospital Campus," he said.

Mr. Guinn said the Col had concluded its report and presented it to the Minister who then met with representatives of the unions in Port Moresby on 10th May 2016

He said after meeting with the Minister, the unions were pleased with the following directions which he issued for immediate action:

The Board is instructed by the Minister to stand down the CEO, Dr James Kintwa;
The Board is instructed to advertise the position of CEO;

The Board is to appoint an interim CEO to manage the affairs of the WHPHA;
The Board must comply with these three instructions within two weeks.

Further, the Board is to work with Department of Personnel Management to regularize the contracts of the CEO and Deputy CEO;
Work with the Department of Works to review issues associated with the hospital's infrastructure;

Work with Treasury to locate funds to attend to infrastructure issues;

Investigate the financial transactions of the Project Management Unit (although it is unclear and may have in fact been the PARSU – clarification is being sought) and;
Expedite the construction of the Nurses' Accommodation.

The Minister said the Col had found no breakdown in the administration of services and no irregularities in the appointment of the Board.

He would write to the Board seeking clarification on as yet unstated other issues raised in the Col report.

Mr. Guinn said staff should be aware that the President of the National Doctors' Association had asked in the media that all clinical staff continue to provide care for our patients and the Board was pleased that issues raised by the petition were being addressed.

Our core business is patient care and as the issues raised have now been addressed, we must all continue to work and serve our people.

Manga Bengi
Editor

Improvements in A&E Unit and roll-out of out-patient services



Doctors and HEOs in the Accidents & Emergency Unit diagnosing patients and deciding the type of treatment to give.

Improvements to the Accidents and Emergency Unit of Mt Hagen Hospital and plans for the roll-out of out-patient services are currently being carried out to improve service delivery.

Chief Executive Officer of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority, Dr. James Kintwa in announcing this recently said an Emergency Physician, Dr. Scotty Kandelyo has also been recruited to provide full-time medical

services in the A&E unit.

Dr. Kandelyo who has been sponsored by the WHPHA to complete his training in the last five years has returned and has initiated some new changes that should see improved services at the emergency unit.

He has initiated shift arrangements for doctors to be present at the A&E on a 24-hour basis so that the public could be seen by a doctor on arrival instead of the duty nurses calling for an on-call doctor to come as was the case previously.

Dr. Kintwa said Dr. Kandelyo's request for essential medical equipment for the A&E unit has been paid for at a cost of K220,000 and with these capabilities, the WHPHA hoped to provide good and efficient services to the people of Western Highlands.

He said Dr. Kandelyo's other request for improved physical layout of the A&E unit has also been attended to and a contractor, Gilsenan Melpa Ltd has been engaged to carry out the job.

On out-patient services, Dr. Kintwa has informed the public that by June this year, the Adults Out-patient and Children's Out-patient services would be provided by the newly-built urban clinics and the existing clinics.

It is hoped that the new urban clinics at Wagbel and Ogelbeng would be completed by June and would support the existing ones at Rebiatul and the Susu Mamas clinics at Newtown and Kagamuga to cover the out-patient services.

Dr. Kintwa said all people seeking primary health care services such as coughs and headaches must go to these clinics and not the out-patients services at Mt Hagen Hospital.

He said those from the rural areas are asked to go to the nearest health facilities there to seek treatment as Mt Hagen Hospital would only accept referrals from the urban and rural facilities.



The new urban clinic at Wagbel nearing completion

Patients speak out on the threats of mass resignation by doctors and nurses

In-patients at Mt Hagen Hospital have had mixed feelings about their health during the beginning of April when doctors and nurses decided to stop work and attend to emergencies only.

While some seemed worried about what may happen to them if there was a mass resignation by the clinicians over their demands for improved services at the hospital, others had faith that the clinicians would not abandon them completely.

Most said nurses still worked in their respective wards despite what had happened and were confident that they would continue to look after and treat them.

Simon Kik, a diabetic patient from Togoba near Mt Hagen said doctors and nurses still visited him and other patients in the medical ward despite what had happened.

He said their presence made them happy and he hoped a workable solution would be reached.

He said the only problem was that the toilets and showers in the ward were blocked at times and

he hoped this problem would be attended to and rectified without delay.

Another patient, Jenny Hupa from Pangia in Southern Highlands is partially paralyzed and has been at the hospital for the last three weeks. She is only able to use about 75 percent of her body including her arms and legs.

She had been referred to Mt Hagen Hospital by the Kimbe Hospital in West New Britain for further treatment.

Mrs. Hupa said she was a simple villager and was worried that if the doctors and nurses resigned, she would have nowhere to go to and no money to buy medicine from pharmacies in town to continue her treatment.

She said she was happy to hear that the clinicians had decided to return to work while waiting for the report of the Investigation Committee.

Young Malakai Peter is four years old and comes from Bukapena village in the Mul/Baiyer District of Western Highlands Province.

He was admitted to the children's ward two weeks ago suffering from asthma.

At his hospital bed, it was obvious that he was slowly recovering from the way he smiled and showed the "tops" sign with his thumb up.

However he and his father Peter were a bit worried that if the doctors and nurses did resign, there may be problems for him if he continued to stay.



Pictured above - Young Malakai with his father Peter at their bedside and below, patient Jenny Hupa with her son Boas and daughter Jennifer in the medical ward.



Diabetic patient, Simon Kik

Mt Hagen doctors and clinicians graduate as middle managers



The graduating doctors and clinicians pose for a picture with the WHPHA Management.

A group of eight senior specialist clinicians from the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) has become the first among its colleagues to graduate as middle managers from the IEA TAFE fully funded by the WHPHA.

The group comprising five senior medical officers, a dental officer and a pharmaceutical manager were presented with their Diplomas in Public Management during a ceremony at the Airport Motel in Mt Hagen on Friday, 22nd April 2016.

The medical professionals had completed six months of theoretical training at the Mt Hagen International Education Agency's College of TAFE and had all completed the training successfully, resulting in their graduation.

The Management of the WHPHA had negotiated with the International Education Agency to run the course for its senior clinicians to equip them with the necessary management skills to manage their functional units to achieve good patient outcomes.

This is in line with the Authority's plans to

provide ongoing training for its employees to equip them with the necessary skills to help take the organization forward and provide quality patient care for the people of Western Highlands and the Highlands region.

The WHPHA Management had approved and funded the training at a total cost of K54,000. Seven of the eight participants had completed all the modules of their training and were presented with their diplomas while one of them had yet to complete a module before graduating.

Those who received their diplomas included Senior Physician, Dr. Kipas Binga, SMO Gynaecology & Obstetrics, Dr. Joseph Kuk, SMO Pediatrics, Dr. Jonah Kurubi, SMO & deputy chief ENT specialist for the Highlands, Dr. Sam Endican, SMO Surgery, Dr. Timmy Tingnee, Dental Officer, Bob Nonongi and Pharmaceutical Manager, Paul Kawage. Deputy Chief Surgeon for the Highlands, Dr. Benjamin Yap has one more module to complete before graduating.

Senior executives of the WHPHA led by the then CEO, Dr. James Kintwa, IEA tutor, Ms.

Maria Kiagi, Western Highlands Governor, Rt Hon. Paias Wingti's Executive Officer, Barry Rungwa, Department of Western Highlands Executive Officer, Steven Moka and family members of the graduates were present to witness the small but significant occasion.

Dr. Kipas Binga said at the outset that the diploma was simply a folded paper indicating that the knowledge and skills acquired were in the mind but they needed to unfold it and use the skills and knowledge that they have gained to benefit their units and the organization they served.

He said the group comprised of middle managers and that the skills that they had acquired would help them to operate between the decision makers (top management) and the implementers below them to run an organization effectively.

He thanked the WHPHA Management for recognizing the importance of this course and sponsoring them as this had now "helped them to see the other side of management" which would help them to make informed decisions.

Then Chief Executive Officer, Dr. James Kintwa said that training of human resources is important and the WHPHA allocates K400,000 for training each year.

He said the need to train middle management staff was important and the Management had recognized this with several other trainings already conducted using other training organizations and had budgeted for staff to attend short and long term courses.

Dr. Kintwa said there were plans to train more middle management staff including nurses and he was thankful to IEA for accepting and running courses for WHPHA.

He added that following the success of this course, other staff including nurses and other managers at Mt Hagen Hospital, rural health facility managers and District Health Officers would be brought in so that they too could be trained in middle management skills to assist them in their work.

"I challenge you graduates to use your new skills to lead your teams to produce results. We will support you in what you do in your workplace to improve service delivery", he said.

Kintwa honors decision to step down as CEO

The Chief Executive Officer of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA), Dr. James Kintwa has accepted the decision of the Board to step aside.

The Board, in a letter to Dr. Kintwa on Thursday, 12th May advised him to step aside following recommendations by the Minister for Health & HIV AIDS, Hon. Michael Malabag.

Mr. Malabag early the previous week said that the findings of the Investigations Committee he had established to look into the management and operations of the WHPHA following a petition by doctors and nurses last month had found no problems in the administration of the

WHPHA however, has made a number of recommendations for the WHPHA Board to implement.

Dr. Kintwa had acknowledged the view of the Minister that the Investigation had not found any serious breach in the administration but his decision was to allow the Board to advertise the position and appoint an acting CEO while the selection process for a permanent CEO took place as also recommended by Mr. Malabag.

Dr. Kintwa said his acceptance of the Board decision to step aside effective on Friday, 13th May was to allow for continuity of services at Mt Hagen Hospital for the sake of the patients and

the public.

He said he had also accepted other recommendations by the Minister for the Board to act upon as a result of the findings of the Investigations Committee.

Dr. Kintwa said whilst he accepted the decision of the Board to step aside, he wanted the doctors and nurses to also take heed of the recommendations and continue to serve our people.

"For the sake of the patients and the health of the people of Western Highlands, I strongly call on the doctors, nurses and CHWs to continue to provide services to our people that we as professionals have pledged under oath to serve", he said.

He said any continued disregard for the Minister's directives by the doctors and nurses would only jeopardize the lives of the public.