

Informed, empowered, healthy

Namuli highlights the need for training materials for patients

An informed patient is an empowered patient who feels free to interact with their environment based on the information given to them, and thus is a healthier patient.¹ In an era where patients are inquisitive and eager to learn more about their medical conditions and prognoses, it cannot be right to ignore the role of a qualified nurse in teaching and promoting self-care.² In a sea of information, without training it is tiresome to discern the best mode of action and direction. Nurses' role as givers of information is even more important now than it used to be before.

Improving the education of the nurse and therefore their ability to educate the patient goes a long way in enabling patients make informed, autonomous decisions on the mode of treatment and the options for management. However, this is not always possible because of many factors. Among the numerous factors affecting patient education is insufficient staffing, which affects the way nurses carry out their role.² However, this does not justify patient ignorance and health-worker complacency because numerous teaching tools are available to aid patient education and have been proven to be effective.³ These aids include brochures, booklets, podcasts, presentations, posters, group classes, video clips and trained peer educators.

In Uganda, adult literacy levels have increased to 70.2%.⁴ It makes sense to include brochures, posters and booklets in the teaching of patients, especially for the more educated. There is therefore a need to have such materials, but in many cases these are not readily available. This was observed by a nurse from Kampala who embarked on the production of portable and attractive handbooks for patients with various health conditions. Lubega Martin, a 24-year-old graduate nurse from Makerere University College of Health Sciences reported that during his study period at the university, he realised the increasing need for more information delivery to patients to end the large knowledge gap among patients.

In January 2019 he published his first handbook, *My Pregnancy: A Guide for Pregnant Women*. This is intended to provide women with information concerning pregnancy in simple non-medical English language. The simple handbook covers a wide range of essential topics such as pre-conceptual care, signs of vulnerability during pregnancy and management of common pregnancy disorders. He reports that the books are available on streets and some antenatal clinics at an affordable cost to ease access. Most of the women that have used the books have welcomed the

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designs, pictures and presentation of information in the books that has enabled them to get a better understanding of pregnancy. In his opinion, the books are meant to supplement the information delivered to patients by the nurses and midwives to ensure a positive pregnancy experience as recommended by WHO.⁵ Currently he is working on another short handbook, *Living with Diabetes*, as a daily guide for diabetic patients. He encourages nurses to use the books in preparation for health talks and even in their continuous medical education.

Martin believes that patient reading aids should be fancy and attractive to appeal to the audience. However such materials are expensive to produce. There is also the challenge that the books are in English while many patients in Uganda can only read in their local languages. His desire is to translate these books into local languages so that they make sense to more women in Uganda. His hope is that his work will contribute to patient education.

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