

Provide sunscreen lotion for persons with albinism

This week, the Ministry of Health, in a meeting organised by persons living with albinism, indicated that plans are underway to review guidelines to ensure free access to sunscreen lotion, which is essential in preventing rampant skin cancer among these persons.

Whereas this raises hope, the promise has been made multiple times over the years without accompanying action. More than 20,000 Ugandans are living with albinism.

Mr Peter Ogik of the Source of the Nile Union of Persons with Albinism (SNUPA) said they have lost about 10 members due to skin cancer, and that another 24 require cancer treatment.

Currently, access to the lotion is largely through donations, a model Ogik says is risky given declining donor support. Many

who cannot access the lotion and yet lack money to buy from private pharmacies, have to face the wrath of skin damage induced by exposure to the sun and eventual skin cancer.

People with albinism do not have melanin, which protects the skin from damage to the skin caused by the sun.

Information from persons with albinism indicates that in pharmacies, one may buy sunscreen lotion at somewhere between Shs80,000 and Shs200,000 for a 300ml bottle. Many are unable to afford this because they face many forms of discrimination that hinder them from education and being engaged in productive economic activities.

But in the meeting in Kampala, which *Daily Monitor* reported on November 17, the ministry promised to address the issue.

The Commissioner for Community Health in the Ministry of Health, Dr

George Upenytho, said the government has started plans to review clinical guidelines to include sunscreen skin lotion for persons living with albinism so that they are procured and accessed.

He said when this is done, the procurement can be done, depending on the needs, through the National Medical Stores. This is a good gesture, but it should be followed by desired actions to save the members from preventable conditions like cancer and blindness.

But not all is gloomy. Dr Upenytho also said there are programmes already running within the national health programme under the Uganda Cancer Institute, which look at the screening of various forms of cancer.

He said the government is also distributing green glasses that can be offered at community and village levels using screening and identification of these conditions by community health workers, including VHTs.

As the government takes such actions, they should not close their ears to the endless cries of persons with albinism on the need for free access to sunscreen lotions for preventing skin cancer. Prevention is better than cure.

The Issue:

Persons with albinism

Our view:

Government should not close its ears to the endless cries of persons with albinism on the need for free access to sunscreen lotions for preventing skin cancer.