

Rats take African health facilities for a huge toss

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African health facilities have been struck by rat menace as a Ugandan consultant biomedical engineer revealed that almost 60 per cent of the expensive diagnostic equipment in Africa is destroyed by the rats. While addressing a conference at Kampala, Eng. Joseph Ssali told delegates that rats are taking the health facilities of the country for a big toss and they can be considered as the worst enemies of the health devices. Ssali holds a vast experience in installation of health equipment in hospitals across the continent.

"I can tell you that rats destroy up to 60% of health equipment in Africa," Ssali said at the first Biennial National Uganda National Biomedical Engineering Conference at Hotel Africa on Monday. While discussing this major issue, Ssali also emphasized on the importance of consulting the biomedical engineers while managing health equipment including X-rays and CT scans.

For instance, he narrated, cables of a CT scan installed at one unnamed facility were eaten up by rats, costing the institution over US \$5,000 to replace. Biomedical engineers are professionals who maintain and repair machines for diagnosing medical problems. They design medical equipment and devices, artificial internal organs or synthetic body parts.

In Africa, the profession is relatively new-just about 10 years old in Uganda, it has been in existence in the developed world for nearly half a century. Without biomedical engineers, the functioning of health equipment would be at stake and costs of hiring experts to maintain them or procure new equipment would be unmanageable.

Ssali further stated that most of the health institutes of the region are not following proper protocol of managing the health equipment by consulting a biomedical engineer. The most common practice that these institutes follow is firstly they acquire the device and then install it without any assistance of biomedical engineer. Hence, this increases the risk on the patients.

"There are cases where radiation equipment has been installed next to antenatal rooms, which is dangerous. Consideration not made to patient safety," he explains. Equipment that emit radiation require careful assessment of numerous factors including: location, including room size, wall thickness, power supply and patient safety, Ssali said.

The conference, held under the theme: 'Enhancing Healthcare through Biomedical Engineering,' seeks to promote biomedical engineering in Uganda and strengthen partnerships among key players.