

July 7<sup>th</sup> 2021

**A RESPONSE TO THE MALICIOUS and FALSE INFORMATION IN THE PUBLICATION BY OPENDEMOCRACY, JUNE 30<sup>TH</sup> 2021**

The Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB), which is the health department of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, has noted with concern the article reportedly published by Inter-press and Open Democracy on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2021 and authored by one [Khatondi Soita Wepukhulu](#). The article titled “Anti-gay ‘therapy’ offered at Uganda health centres run by aid-funded groups” alleges that an undercover reporter went to Nsambya hospital, Rubaga hospital and Kisubi hospital “in the Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau (UCMB) network”. UCMB categorically denies supporting or promoting discrimination of any type in health service provision and is disappointed by the misinterpretation and misrepresentation made by the said “undercover reporter”. The UCMB has investigated this matter and wishes to address the falsehoods in the article and the malicious intentions directed to the institution to discredit the health services offered by the network.

The Catholic health network in Uganda, like everywhere else, upholds the principles of international declaration, Regional and national guidelines that promote non-discriminatory, all-inclusive health services with respect to human rights. The health service delivery protocols in the Catholic Health Network in Uganda are firmly guided by the Gospel values of Non-Judgemental approach to care (c.f. John 8:7, Mathew 7:1) and adhere to the Church Teachings as enshrined in the Catechism (Paragraph 2358 of CCC, which encourages that..... ‘homosexuals must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.’ There is therefore no institutional policy to discriminate against, let alone provide any specific therapies for persons with homosexual orientation. The Mission of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, of which the UCMB is a part, is “To promote integral human development in the whole world inspired by gospel values (Lk. 4:18 ff) Further, UCMB is guided by Jn 10:10 “..I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full”. UCMB is also committed to contributing to the Sustainable Development Goal 3, target 3.8 which is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being *for all at all ages* by 2030”.

UCMB, as a department of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, does not promote or condone discrimination. Biblical teachings that underpin the Church’s Healthcare ministry and the global goal by which UCMB is guided, commits it and all health facilities under its umbrella to providing health services without discrimination.

Medical practitioners and other health workers under the UCMB network, through their professional engagements, work to provide health services indiscriminately. Sex conversion therapy is not part of the “health services package” of any of our member health facilities nor of the Ministry of Health. Due to the non-discrimination principles and practices that we pursue, indeed our services are sought by all categories of people with no recourse to sexual orientation and risk profiles. Further, the Human Resource Employee manuals for hospitals and health centers in the UCMB network explicitly state that all health facilities “have a responsibility to ensure that the clientele and other members are treated with dignity and respect” and “Harassment and discrimination of any kind is inconsistent with the mission”.

The UCMB and its network facilities fully comply with the Patients’ Charter of the Ministry of Health produced in 2009 and reviewed leading to the Ministerial Directive of June 2014 on Access to Health Services without Discrimination. Both documents clearly state that “No health facility or health worker shall discriminate between patients on grounds of disease, religion, political, disability, nationality, sex, age, social status, ethnicity, country of birth or other such grounds”. While the patients’ rights are spelt in both the Patients Charter (2009) and the Ministerial Directive referred to above, the same documents also confer responsibilities to clients, among which is the “responsibility to provide the health worker with accurate, relevant, complete and accurate information for diagnostic, treatment, rehabilitation or counselling purpose”. The article describes an undercover reporter presenting herself with an alleged distress due to concerns for her brother in absentia. She alleged the brother received amorous phone messages from a man.

UCMB investigated the allegations against Nsambya hospital, Rubaga hospital and Kisubi hospital and determined that the policies of these hospitals, like for all Catholic health institutions under UCMB, do not provide for or promote discrimination of any type, of those who seek health services. The individual who allegedly provided information about “conversion therapy”, something alien to UCMB package of health services, in Nsambya hospital was not a staff of the hospital but an intern studying Clinical Psychology at a University and was providing counselling. Internship is like “industrial training” aimed at gaining practical experience to strengthen the classroom training. However, UCMB finds it unfortunate that this intern carried out this counselling session without consulting the supervisor. Moving forward, all the facilities will be guided to ensure that interns do not engage with clients without consulting their supervisors. We note that at the end of his internship, the trainee returned to the University and is no longer with the hospital.

With regard to Rubaga hospital, the information we have got indicates that there was no counselling of a person who presented as gay. Instead, a lady presented to the counsellor saying she was very distressed by the fact that her brother received amorous advances from a male and needed support. She, the “under cover reporter” was the one who said she wanted the brother “to stop since he was still young” . The client (the undercover reporter) was therefore referred to the Mental Health focal person at the facility to handle her stated distress. It is clear now that the counsellor (mental health focal person) in the hospital was deliberately misled by the client to respond to her wrong information of being under stress and depression and counselled her as a case of mental health for

her own stress. Because she presented herself as a case of mental stress (mental problem), the counsellor did mention the need to refer her outside to a psychiatrist.

In our interaction with Rubaga hospital, the information we got suggests that the undercover reporters subsequently twisted a lot of statements or tried to force the counsellor to accept having said what he had not said. We therefore conclude that, the hospital staff did not try to provide conversion therapy to anybody who presented as a homosexual.

Under the non-discrimination policy, refusing to counsel her (the undercover reporter) for the alleged stress she claimed to have, would have tantamounted to discrimination. Article 1 of the Patients Charter (2009) and section 5 (a) of the Ministerial Directive on access to health services (2014) on “Right to Medical Care” say that “Every person in need of medical care is entitled to impartial access to treatment in accordance with the regulations, conditions, services and arrangements attainable at a given time in the health care system”.

The management of Kisubi hospital was not aware of the reported act by their staff. If the staff offered to provide such a service, then it was a personal or individual action but not part of the hospital service package.

Accordingly, while sex conversion therapy is not part of the health systems package, management of stress is part of the mandate of the health facilities and like any of the other entities mentioned in the article, there was no deliberate effort made beyond the alleged emails that sought correct and consistent responses from UCMB yet serious and malicious propaganda was levelled against her meant to discredit and cripple the quality health services that the Catholic health networks painstakingly endeavours to offer without discrimination.

Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau together with her umbrella health facilities, guided by the Church’s Social teaching and the Catechism of the Catholic Church with respect to non-discrimination, have pursued and commits to continue pursuing access to health services to all without discrimination. UCMB further calls upon all persons seeking health services at any of its member facilities to provide the health workers with relevant, complete and accurate information to enable provision of appropriate services to them in the processes of diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation or counselling.

**Serving with One Heart, For God and My Country**



Dr Sam Orochi Orach  
Executive Secretary