

Changing the face of Psychiatry

Dr. Noeline Nakasujja

Email Contact:

Doctorate Studies: Makerere University and Karolinska Institute - Sweden 2007 - 2011

Doctorate Research Area: Cognitive function in patients with HIV and Psychosis.

Title of Doctorate research: 'Cognitive deficits and HIV associated psychotic disorders in Uganda'

Dr. Noeline Nakasujja is the Ag. Head of the Psychiatry Department, College of Health Sciences Makerere University. For her PhD studies, she compared cognition and psychotic disorders in people living with HIV AIDS and those living without it. Psychosis is a mental health condition in which an individual loses touch with reality. For this research, Dr. Nakasujja sampled a total of 156 HIV positive and 322 HIV negative individuals in Butabika Psychiatric National Referral Hospital.

"This study is the first of its kind in the detailed assessment of cognitive function for HIV AIDS patients who have mental illness. I discovered that these patients perform poorly in comparison to patients who have psychosis only. This is partly because HIV alone affects the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. So the presence of psychosis compounds the problem even further," she explains.

"I also discovered that there are certain types of psychiatric



disorders in HIV positive patients that do not fall in any of the major categories of mental illness. My study helps future researchers and medical practitioners identify the different ways that HIV positive patients will psychotic disorders present and subsequently how they should be managed," she adds.

By joining the Psychiatry Department and researching on mental health, Dr. Nakasujja braved the stigma enacted by younger and sometimes older fellow health workers towards the discipline. Among some of the myths associated with the stigma for the practise was the belief that the profession was for the older generation that if you practised then you became like the patients one treated.

She has since inspired other students to choose a career in psychiatry. "I hear comments that having young people in the discipline now has changed the face of psychiatry for the better. I joined medicine to help people and I realised there was a gap in psychiatry since many students opt for gynaecology, paediatrics, obstetrics and internal medicine as first options. I am glad that this is beginning to change as many students get inspired to join psychiatry. The need is dire given the many challenges that stress people across all age brackets, resulting into mental distress as well as the complications that arise with it," she asserts.

Awards and Recognitions work and research during the time of pursuing the PhD:

- 2006: Best Scientific Poster, Course on Leadership & Professional skills for young psychiatrists, Addis Ababa Ethiopia; Certificate
- 2006: Best presenter, Best Young Researcher, Faculty of Medicine and Institute of Public Health, Makerere University 2nd Annual Scientific conference: Plaque
- 2007: Best Scientific Poster, Course on Leadership & Professional skills for young psychiatrists from African countries, Nairobi, Kenya: Certificate
- 2009: Outstanding Mentor Award from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Plaque
- 2010: Recognition for Scientific Achievements Award, Uganda Society for Health Scientists; Plaque

Graduate Students Supervision

- 2 PhD students
- She has successfully supervised four MA students to completion.

Membership to Professional Organisations

- Uganda Medical Association
- Association of Uganda Women Doctors Association



- Mental Health Research Club
- Africa Psycare Research Organization
- Uganda Psychiatric Association
- World Psychiatrist Association.
- International Psycho geriatric Association
- The Network: Towards Unity For Health (Task force Chair)
- Alzheimer's International Society
- Board Member, Uganda Society for Health Scientists