

UGANDA'S QUALITY CHAMPIONS

Mildmay Uganda, a non-governmental organisation, was established in Uganda in 1998 as a Centre of Excellence for the provision of HIV and AIDS prevention, care, treatment and training services. Over time, Mildmay Uganda has diversified its services specialising in the delivery of healthcare. The organisation now supports more than 100,000 people living with HIV and provides general hospital care to more than 15,000 patients.

Dina Patel speaks to Dr Barbara Mukasa, Executive Director; Dr Yvonne Karamagi, Director of Medical Services; Moses Bwambale Kyamakya, M&E Quality Assurance Manager; Mary Odiit, Director of Research and Strategic Information; and Belinda Tumushabe, Quality Assurance Specialist at Mildmay Uganda, to discover how the organisation is providing sustainable health prevention, care and treatment.

Photos clockwise from top: Barbara Mukasa, Moses Bwambale Kyamakya, Mary Odiit, Belinda Tumushabe

With a population of about 44 million people, Uganda has one of the youngest and most rapidly growing populations in the world, and though life expectancy has risen in the past 20 years, it is still less than 60 years (World Bank). According to the World Health Organization, communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhoeal diseases account for more than 50 per cent of morbidity and mortality in Uganda.

Since its launch in 1994, the Ministry of Health (MoH) of the national Quality Assurance Program (QAP) in Uganda has worked to improve care and institutionalise a culture of quality by ensuring guidelines and standards are developed, disseminated and used. A report on Uganda's healthcare quality improvement journey by University Research Co said this focus on quality has been sustained despite the sometimes fragile political and social environment, communicable and non-communicable diseases, long periods of uncertainty, and inconsistent funding.

The four autonomous business arms of Mildmay Uganda – Mildmay Uganda Hospital, Mildmay Institute of Health Sciences (MIHS), the Mildmay Center of Research and Strategic Information (MUCREST) and health programmes – support the Ministry of Health, and the organisation has participated in research studies that have contributed to national policies.

Mildmay Uganda has also supported the National Health Sector Quality Improvement Framework and Strategic Plan and is working with the ministry to roll it out. The goal is to ensure that by 2020, everyone accessing the healthcare services in Uganda attains the best possible health outcomes and to improve consumer acceptability and satisfaction.

Quality structure

Dr Yvonne Karamagi tells QW that Mildmay Uganda, a CQI corporate partner, initially offered quality health services and then expanded to support other districts and interested parties to ensure everyone is contributing to the UN's sustainable development goals. In particular, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, and to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for people of all ages. "Our mission is to empower communities by providing quality healthcare, developing human resources for health and generating evidence to influence health policies."

As the Director of Medical Services, Karamagi is responsible for the medical directorate. This involves hospital services and district health strengthening projects.

"In this role, I support strategic execution, planning, evaluation, resource allocation and compliance to quality assurance standards

Uganda in 2018

- 1,400,000 people were living with HIV.
- 53,000 people were newly infected with HIV.
- 23,000 people died from an AIDS-related illness.
- There has been progress in the number of AIDS-related deaths since 2010, with a 58 per cent decrease, from 56,000 deaths to 23,000 deaths.
- The number of new HIV infections has also decreased, from 92,000 to 53,000 in the same period.
- Ninety-three per cent of pregnant women living with HIV accessed antiretroviral medicine to prevent transmission of the virus to their baby, preventing 17,000 new HIV infections among newborns.

Source: UNAIDS

"Mildmay Uganda initially offered quality health services and then expanded to support other districts and interested parties"

Images: Comprehensive quality healthcare services offered by Mildmay Uganda Hospital



across the building. I ensure that all of our services continually satisfy our patients," Karamagi explains.

As the Quality Assurance Specialist, Belinda Tumushabe coordinates and supports the different departments to ensure they are offering services in accordance with quality standards.

"I provide basic quality concepts that the departments can apply to solve their day-to-day problems," Tumushabe says. "I also support them during the review of their performance so that they can identify gaps and come up with strategies to close them out."

Karamagi argues that quality management is the vehicle with which Mildmay Uganda delivers its strategic plan. "It is at the core of how we can achieve our objectives," she says.

Quality management ensures the organisation has identified the different requirements it should comply to. For example, Tumushabe says that Mildmay Uganda is currently working to align itself with ISO 9001:2015 – Quality management systems. The organisation also has national standards it needs to comply with from the Ministry of Health's Quality Assurance Department for the hospital. In addition to this, the Ministry of Education supervises the school, and the National NGO Board regulates the business of NGOs.

Moses Bwambale Kyamakya, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Quality Assurance Manager for Mildmay Uganda, manages the strategic information needs for the organisation, projects, the hospital and oversees the quality assurance agenda. "Different donors may also have specific standards that need to be taken into consideration," he says. "We also have internal standards developed by the strategic planning team, and we need a quality management system that ensures we are compliant. The aim of it all is to ensure we have a satisfied customer and efficient services."

Different quality processes have also been drafted for different levels at Mildmay Uganda, Tumushabe explains. "For example, there is the top management team, which is responsible for strategic planning, policy development and procedures, and management reviews. The next level is the quality assurance team, which deals with internal audits and supports teams with implementing various quality methodologies. Then we have the senior managers, and below them we have the team that carries out routine operations."

Encouraging staff engagement

The motivation for the organisation to seek ISO 9001:2015 certification came from a need to improve slow and inefficient services and ensure that customers are happy. Karamagi says Mildmay Uganda wanted to be compliant with all the

different interested parties and to stay competitive as a business by ensuring customer satisfaction.

The organisation is working on implementing the areas of improvement as recommended by the auditors. Mildmay Uganda successfully passed the first stage of the audit and is looking towards excelling in the upcoming second stage.

One of the challenges the organisation faced when implementing ISO 9001:2015 was changing the way people were carrying out their routine processes. "You have to ask staff to do things more systematically, to document everything and to have consistency," Tumushabe says. "The staff perceived it as extra work and this was a challenge as we had to focus on effectively integrating the changes."

Karamagi says the company got past this by highlighting the improvements to employees and focusing on the challenges that had been identified and addressed. "We had to start by making sure management supported the change. We have over 18 managers and they are all engaged in this process. They are our change champions."

The organisation pointed out each department's contribution and this meant everyone could see what they had done towards implementing ISO 9001:2015. There was also an intensive awareness campaign for the teams. Karamagi says the benefits are already visible as the organisation has achieved operational efficiencies. "We've had actual cost savings by being standardised and systematic. We've also improved team dynamics. We have an annual management review meeting where all of our stakeholders and vendor reports are disseminated. Our interaction with our external stakeholders is clearer, the communication is better, and they appreciate that."

Revealing risks

Through implementing ISO 9001:2015, Mildmay Uganda has been proactively determining risks so that incidents can be prevented. The organisation has allowed teams to identify risks easily and put measures in place to avert them – for example, the risk of failing to meet the needs and expectations of the partners, which would significantly impact the organisation since its major source of income is through funding. This risk is being monitored regularly to ensure compliance.

Karamagi says employees are starting to come up with ways to improve their own operations without even being asked.

This has made each team more accountable for their actions and encourages continuous improvement. Different departments have appointed quality champions to drive the quality agenda and to come together to share what happens in their department. "We conduct performance evaluations on a quarterly basis. We review those results and determine how

much we've been able to achieve and how far we are from our goal," Karamagi says. "When we determine that gap, we prioritise which areas we are going to launch quality improvement projects in, and then together with the quality assurance team, we conduct root cause analysis. We might use the fishbone quality tool, for example."

Any changes to a process are also tested to determine if any improvements were made and to ensure the quality is maintained.

Kyamakya proudly states that Mildmay Uganda is also a member of the National Quality Improvement Coordination Committee and as such, the organisation is able to have a voice at a national level. For instance, in 2013, Mildmay Uganda identified a gap in the web-based documentation and reporting of quality improvement activities, following a situational analysis on quality improvement in the health sector.

"Between 2013 and 2014, the organisation developed a prototype of the Ministry of Health's quality improvement journal using MySQL technology," says Kyamakya. "In 2014, the prototype was shared with the ministry's quality assurance department and it received positive reviews and recommendations. In 2015, we also provided training to health workers across 16 districts on how to use the quality improvement portal. Mildmay Uganda later shared the user experience with the National Quality Improvement Coordination Committee and in 2017, the committee recommended a national pilot of the portal."

Mildmay Uganda now uses the portal in 456 health facilities in 16 districts in Uganda, 12 regional referral hospitals and seven general hospitals. Mary Odiit, Director of Research and Strategic Information at Mildmay Uganda, says: "Mildmay Uganda has established an electronic monitoring tool to implement continuous quality improvement in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. This tool has been effective in ensuring real-time data on quality improvement intervention and timely decisions can be made to support the facilities better. Mildmay Uganda is committed to creating innovation for better health systems and patient outcomes."

The future

Going forward, the next biggest challenge for Mildmay Uganda will be to grow the existing hospital into a leading teaching hospital. "We have the capacity to support the different trainees and allow them to learn and grow as we have at Mildmay Uganda," Tumushabe says.

"The other big thing we're looking at is getting our ISO 9001:2015 certification. We have three quality objectives. One is to attain and maintain ISO 9001:2015 certification. Our second objective

A history of quality in Uganda

- 1994:** Uganda launches its Quality Assurance Program.
- 1995:** Uganda's first QA training manual, *Quality Assurance Manual for Health Workers*, is developed.
- 1997:** Uganda's Quality Assurance Department (QAD) develops the *Manual for QI Methods for Health Workers* for quality improvement implementation.
- 1998:** The QAP transitions to the QAD under the Directorate of Planning and Development.
- 2010:** The QAD develops the *National Health Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) and Strategic Plan (SP) 2010/2011 - 2014/15* to institutionalise, harmonise, and coordinate quality management interventions in the health sector.
- 2011:** A National QI Coordination Committee chaired by the Director of Health Services Planning is established to facilitate networking and collaboration of development partners, implementing partners, civil society organisations, academia and various stakeholders in QI at the national level.
- 2012:** Mildmay Uganda establishes a QAD during an organisational strategic review.
- 2013:** Mildmay Uganda departments and district quality improvement teams are established.
- 2014:** Joint quarterly quality improvement orientations, mentorships and coaching sessions are integrated into routine technical assistance. Also, quality improvement projects are initiated at different levels using recommended QI approaches and tools.
- 2015:** Mildmay Uganda applies for Corporate Membership with CQI UK.
- 2016-2018:** Senior staff undertake a week long QMS Lead Auditor training by Bureau Veritas.
- 2018:** Mildmay Uganda pursues ISO certification.

Source: usaiddassist.org/sites/default/files/usaidd_assist_uganda_qi_journey_dec2018.pdf



Mildmay Uganda and the CQI
Dr Barbara Mukasa, Executive Director at Mildmay Uganda:

"Mildmay Uganda is proud to be associated with the Chartered Quality Institute. This partnership has exposed us to the importance of quality management systems, and "this is part of the reason why we are pursuing ISO 9001:2015 certification in addition to the lab accreditation in ISO 15189:2012. We hope to achieve two core objectives as we implement our quality management system - operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Mildmay Uganda hopes to stay on top of its quality assurance agenda at both a national and international level."



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is to ensure the technical competence of staff, and thirdly, we want to have satisfied customers. It is a broad one, but it is our main goal - to ensure we have a happy customer."

Karamagi says customers cannot be fooled and that a customer's definition of quality is based on their perception. If a service is good, she says, they will come back. "We've also held a number of sessions with the CQI and we have learned many things, for example using quality champions and root cause analysis. We have also made efforts to incorporate the CQI's Competency Framework," Karamagi says. "We've made efforts to improve, and leadership and assurance are key areas for us to look at. For example, the line managers have been trained to lead improvement interventions. Assurance has been applied by standardising all core processes, and periodic quality audits are done to ensure the outputs are conforming and there is compliance to the available standards."

One of the challenges the organisation faces is gaining funding from donors as 90 per cent of the organisation's budget is funded. However, Mildmay Uganda is on a clear journey to becoming a key player in Uganda's economic growth and Karamagi proudly asserts, "Quality will be pivotal to our success." ■