

Don sounds dieticians shortage alarm as lifestyle illnesses soar

By MASEMBE TAMBWE

WITH increased incidences of lifestyle illnesses and other non-communicable diseases coupled with severe insufficiency of dieticians in the country, the creation of a more health conscious society is paramount.

The Hubert Kariuki Memorial University Associate Professor of Nutrition, Dr Godwin Ndossi, told this newspaper that the dearth of dieticians in the country was real, adding that they are few while the need is bigger, particularly in hospital settings where management of diet related NDCs require the services of such professionals.

"In Tanzania, our focus was for a long time on community nutrition because we did not have a huge lifestyle problem of nutrition," he cited.

That situation is changing rapidly due to many factors including urbanisation, globalisation, increasing levels of affluence all leading to changes in lifestyle favouring development of diet related NCDs.

Dr Ndossi said that given these chances, he strongly supports the establishment of dietetics programmes in universities to cater for local need.

"Initially, we could start by sending a crop of students to say Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and other countries where such programmes exist and when they return they can be deployed

to teach and provide services in hospitals where they are in great demand," he suggested.

Speaking exclusively to the 'Sunday News,' Stay Slim Health Club trainer, Stanley Salira, said that since dietician courses in higher learning institutions are almost non-existent, spreading success stories to the public is the quickest way of educating the masses.

"The media is pivotal in this; they need to encourage people to be health conscious by enticing them to read books and learn from doctors. However, whilst this is going on, the government has to start these courses because the demand is very huge during these times," he cited.

Though used interchangeably, there is a difference between a dietitian and nutritionist where a dietitian is a qualified health professional who helps promote good health through proper nutritional habits, while a nutritionist is someone who works with food and nutritional science, aiming to prevent diseases related to nutrient deficiencies. Nutritionists are often certified by professional organisations.

Dietetics is a specialised area of nutrition where the focus is on the relationship between diet and health. This area of training is well established in countries where the prevalence of diet related NDCs is high.

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