

Enhancing Covid fight

BY ERIC MSIKITI

AS is the case in most public healthcare facilities in rural areas across the country, workers at Kunenekude Health Centre in Mwanza District are finding it tough to provide quality services to patients who flood the facility to seek medical care.

The Covid pandemic is making things worse.

The health centre supports a population of at least 18,500 people but Nurse-in-Charge, Lusubilo Kamphale, says the figure could be higher as others from Mozambique and Neno District also find their way to the facility.

“We only have one faulty infrared thermometer which we use for measuring temperatures when testing for Covid-19,” Kamphale says.

The solar-powered water system at the health centre is also not working. A nearby borehole is what they turn to though it poses hygiene challenges.

“The absence of a reliable water supply system close to the facility is making our efforts in fighting the pandemic more difficult. Water is an important commodity at any hospital,” she adds.

These are just some of the challenges the 31 healthcare workers at the facility are facing as they fight hard to save lives in the wake of the raging pandemic.

Kamphale also says that the patrols the facility used to conduct in areas bordering Malawi and Mozambique to prevent importation of cases of Covid into the country have long stopped due to lack of resources.

At the District Hospital, almost 15 kilometres away, the situation is not any better.

The hospital, which is the largest of the four health facilities in the border district, caters for over 130,000 people.

The coming of the pandemic has piled more pressure on the limited resources at the facility.

Health workers now have balance between providing quality support to people suffering from other ailments and those suffering from Covid-19.

As a border district, Mwanza is having its share of the Covid pandemic with a total of 164 confirmed cases recorded and four deaths. The district has conducted close to 4,500 tests.

“But we still need more health care workers to balance between our normal services and the Covid situation. We need more doctors, nurses, clinical officers, laboratory personnel, anaesthetists and hospital attendants to cope with the situation,” says Infection Prevention and Control Coordinator, Ibrahim Gambuleni. Gambuleni says health care



PARTNERSHIP—Save the Children officials and healthcare workers



KAMTIMALEKA—We are also training health workers



KAMPHALE—Water is an important commodity

workers are still working hard to save lives despite the challenges that they are facing.

When President Lazarus Chakwera declared Malawi a State of National Disaster at the advent of the second wave of the Covid pandemic early this year, he essentially called for support from various stakeholders who have joined the fight against the pandemic.

Child-centred organisation Save the Children also joined the fight by, among other things, activating its crisis modifier programme which is providing support to vulnerable households apart from building the capacity of Malawian hospitals to effectively fight the pandemic.

On top of that, the organisation is also responding to the crisis with support from the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid programme with various items

including those related to hygiene.

And had the organisation not intervened, facilities such as Kunenekude Health Centre and Mwanza District Hospital could find it tough to cope with the pandemic.

From the €1.7 million-worth aid, Save the Children has already reached out to Mwanza District Council with personal protective equipment for healthcare workers, hand sanitisers for officers handling Covid and suspected Covid cases and water treatment chemicals to rural communities.

It is through this arrangement that Kunenekude Health Centre, in one of the remotest sections of the border district, will now have a water tank and its solar-powered system restored.

“We are also training our healthcare workers on how they can provide quality health services to people who test positive for the

coronavirus so that we effectively respond to the pandemic,” says Save the Children Senior Humanitarian Operations and Resilience Manager, Steve Kamtimaleka.

Kamtimaleka also says under the programme, the organisation is also providing support to communities and local councils to have well detailed and updated Covid preparedness and response plans just like those at national level.

“We also have actually activated the crisis modifier to basically meet some of the health related needs such as shortage of oxygen cylinders, personal protective equipment and water treatment chemicals in both referral hospitals and district hospitals in the four districts of Mulanje, Mwanza, Mangochi and Blantyre after the President declared a State of National Disaster,” he says. Kamtimaleka also says apart

from the support the organisation is providing through the health component of the program, Save the Children is building the capacity of district councils to respond to other natural disasters.

“We want the local councils to have the capability of responding to disasters and providing support to communities when disaster strikes,” he says.

In Mwanza District alone, the organisation has provided Covid prevention items worth K19 million. One million Malawians are targeted.

“In all this, we are fighting that children should have their rights protected. They should enjoy their childhood. They should remain safe—some have even lost parents and need all kinds of support. Protecting children would be difficult if adults, especially those who take care of them, were not protected,” Kamtimaleka says.