

Universal Health Coverage, Kenyans discuss Agenda 4

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Nation Media Group NTV organized a live television debate at the University of Nairobi to discuss Universal Health Coverage, one of the big 4 agenda by the Government of Kenya. The event was held at the Chandaria Auditorium on July 5, 2018.

The University of Nairobi Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Peter Mbithi took the opportunity to challenge health professionals to reflect more on ethics around healthcare when handling human lives. "The government has prioritized healthcare, we must plan, reason together and come up with solutions. Health is life, lets reflect on ethics around health. Destroying life is evil," he said.

Several pertinent issues were discussed among them the importation of Cuban doctors yet some Kenyan doctors are yet to be employed including 500+ specialists. Speaking on behalf of the Health Cabinet Secretary, Sicily Kariuki, Chief Administrative Secretary, Dr. Rashid Aman observed that the Cuban Doctors were brought in to bridge the human capacity deficit since some regions were understaffed. "As a country we need to re-engineer our strategy so that we promote preventive medicine and champion change of lifestyle so that we can prevent non-communicable diseases," he said.

Speaker after speaker poured praise on the model used by Makueni County in managing the healthcare in their region. Makueni Governor, Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, outlined the model used to give all Makueni residents universal healthcare coverage. "What we did was very simple. Before deciding to roll out universal health coverage, we did a situational analysis of the health sector investment. We had to build new health facilities from 109 to 233 and employed more health staff so that we have 1500 of them from 977," he said. He outlined a program where all households would

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contribute Ksh 500 per year. Prof. Kibwana also said that Makueni County pays for its drugs from KEMSA and all counties are encouraged to do that. He opposed the move to have health sector moved back to the national government as that will land Kenyans in trouble because they are now used to getting health services near them.

In order to achieve Universal Health Coverage, the government has been at the forefront in having everyone enrolled in National Hospital Insurance Fund, (NHIF) program, where people pay Ksh 500 monthly and they are able to access the health services in virtually all hospitals countrywide. The move has been very successful, though a section of Kenyans are afraid of funds misuse as it emerged from a section of the television audience.

Going forward, it was agreed that the Government should prioritize universal health coverage by engaging in preventing and treating non communicable diseases like pneumonia, malaria as they are the top killers in the country. More community health professionals need to be trained as well. More engagement and public participation need to be done as Kenyans are engaged on issued around healthcare.

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