

JOINT MEDICAL STORE @ 40 YEARS

New Vision

ADVERTISER SUPPLEMENT

By Ritah Mukisa

Forty years down the road, the Joint Medical Store (JMS) is still the leading private pharmaceutical firm in Uganda, offering quality products and services.

Dr Emmanuel Higenyi, the director technical services, says they have maintained this position because they are guided by their vision of being the leading supplier of quality health solutions for the Glory of God.

"Quality defines JMS. We practice stringent quality assurance mechanisms to protect our clients from substandard commodities," Higenyi says.

He adds that they have put in place key quality interventions at different levels. For example, JMS emphasises legitimacy of the products before they are accepted and distributed to different health facilities.

Higenyi adds that medicines are produced bearing in mind the countries where they are used because what is produced for a country in Europe may not work for Uganda.

The quality assurance department also scrutinises the movement of products and their handling.

Kevin Juma Otieno, the quality assurance officer and company pharmacist, adds that medicines deteriorate if they are not handled well. So, the clinicians may not get the therapeutic benefits they expect, and in the end, they put the blame on JMS.

"When we receive the commodities, we check all those factors," he notes.

Stringent process

Otieno says to ensure quality products, his department starts the task before they receive the commodities.

"When someone shows interest in sending supplies to JMS, they undergo a prequalification process. They list the products they wish to supply and we evaluate the manufacturer," he explains.

Otieno adds that they also have a risk-based criterion, which follows a World Health Organisation (WHO) tool. If, for example, the product is manufactured by a country whose local regulator is considered to be stringent, then we may not go there to verify. But if it is manufactured in a country which WHO does not consider to be a stringent regulatory authority, JMS inspects to confirm that the company is capable of manufacturing products that meet JMS' quality standards.

"Once the manufacturer is cleared, we then turn to the product. We review it against our specifications and the manufacturer's. We get samples of the product and test them," he says.

When it passes the tests, they then turn to the supplier. They find out if he is local or foreign.

By this, JMS wants to ensure that the suppliers comply with the good distribution practices.

"Our team goes to the supplier's facility and audits them against the good distribution practices to ensure that they sell products in good condition," Otieno says.

After the manufacturer, supplier and products have all passed the tests, then, the product is prequalified. From this stage, it goes to the procurement department,



To ensure quality products for Ugandans, the Joint Medical Store employs modern quality assurance mechanisms

'Quality defines JMS'

which orders for the supply. Otieno says the the prequalification process helps to weed out wrong elements.

Those that supply counterfeits are blacklisted and forwarded to the National Drug Authority (NDA) for action. Meanwhile, every batch that is delivered to JMS goes through the quality assurance system. But because quality assurance is expensive to carry out, JMS has a risk-based criteria.

"We pay attention to every product, supplier and manufacturer," he says.

For example, they do due diligence by seeing the comments and complaints about the manufacturer on the Internet. If the complaints and call backs are many, the product goes under mandatory testing. This way, JMS optimises the use of resources.

Additionally, Higenyi says every product has to go through the JMS laboratory.

Here, the experts confirm the chemistry, formulation, composition and the claim the manufacture puts on the label. For example, if he says this is paracetamol 500mg, then the experts take it to the laboratory and confirm the specifications.

Feedback key

For the medical supplies, Otieno says his team does experiential testing and expert opinion.

"We give samples to the clinicians to use and give us feedback. In case of a fault, we retest and get back to the manufacturer.

We control entry of poor quality commodities and ensure that what we output is standard," he says.

Even when the product reaches the

customer, JMS uses the post-market surveillance system. They endeavour to find out how the end-user feels about their products in terms of efficacy. If it is a drug that is supposed to cure headache, does it do so? How safe is it, do people react to it?

"We have developed a system where customers get back to us. Feedback has helped NDA to withdraw some products," Otieno says.

For a number of products, Higenyi says JMS deals directly with the manufacturers. But even where JMS has no direct contact, they have mechanisms to ensure that they do not get substandard commodities.

"Where we are dealing with agents, we get information about the manufacturers from the agents, then do due diligence," he says.

Delivery

He says their supply chain architecture is based on a hybrid model. "It includes last mile delivery, direct to the facility doorstep and the other is intermediate warehouses at the branches," Otieno says.

After they have delivered at the regional level, the branch then does the remaining last mile. Where JMS does not have an outlet, the organisation delivers directly to the facility doorstep.

JMS is licensed and regulated by NDA.

"It gives them the framework for operation. Apart from giving us permission to import or export, NDA also prescribes the medicines we should have and who should receive them," Otieno says.



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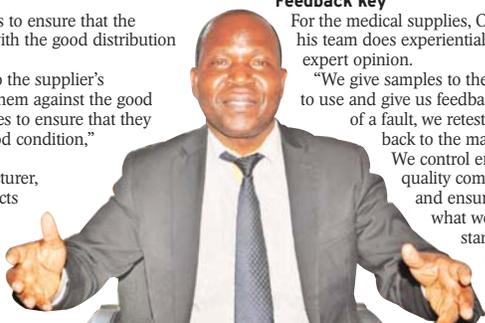
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Dr Emmanuel Higenyi, JMS director technical services