

From Complaints to Compliments: Mbale Hospital's C&C Desk

The Compliments and Complaints Desk at Mbale Hospital has increased both staff accountability and staff morale.

Mbale Regional Referral Hospital is a 400-bed public hospital serving people living in Mbale and 10 surrounding districts, located in Mbale town, in the east of Uganda.

The Compliments and Complaints (C&C) Desk was established in September 2017 as part of a broader effort to strengthen the hospital's Client Charter. Having a clear mechanism to receive and respond to complaints against staff can also help to deter corrupt practices, such as the withholding of services unless bribes have been paid.

At the request of the Ministry of Public Service, SUGAR-TAF provided technical support and advice in setting up the C&C desk, as well as an initial investment to get it off the ground.

The Desk is located at a hospital gate and is staffed by community representatives hired through the AIDS Care Education and Training (ACET), a local NGO. This way, anyone who wants to register a complaint will know that those taking it are neutral.

While hospital staff were initially suspicious of the Desk, the hospital management team had

“When we receive complaints, we follow up and are able to find solutions.”
Mr. Byron Ssemwanga,
Human Resources, Mbale
Hospital

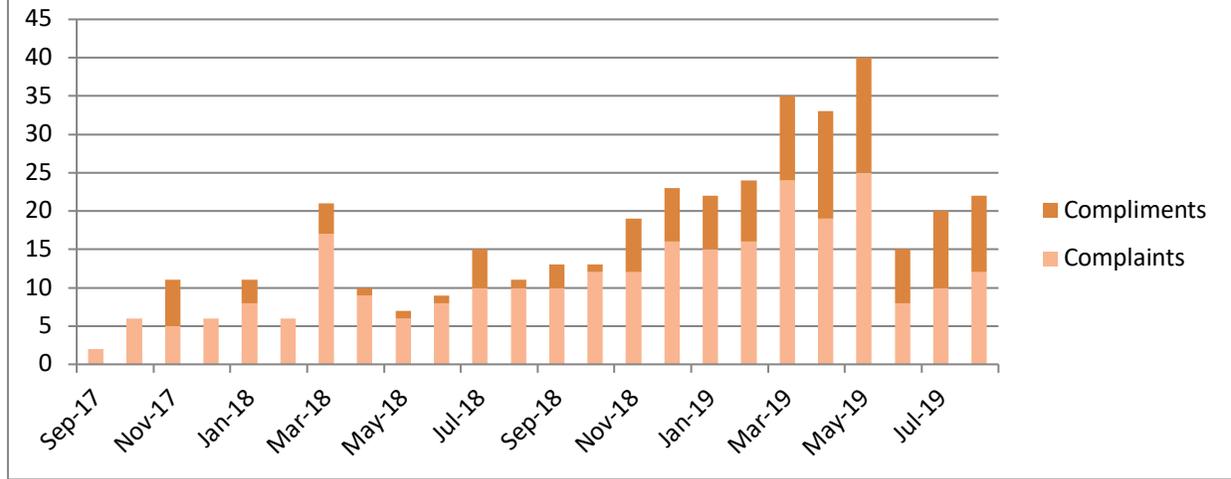
suggested that the Desk register compliments on hospital staff and service, as well as complaints. This helped with initial acceptance, and the functioning of the Desk. Some staff have even taken advantage of the Desk to register their own complaints about management or working conditions.

Over time, public awareness of the C&C Desk has increased and more people have used the desk to register both complaints and compliments. Management response to complaints has become more formalized. The C&C desk provides weekly reports to the hospital, and the hospital provides monthly feedback on actions taken in response. More recently, complaints have been reported to the board, showing that they are being taken seriously by the hospital. Increasingly, cases are brought before the hospital Rewards and Disciplinary Committee when staff are found to be in the wrong. In a few cases, staff have also been referred to the police for further investigation.

Hospital management has increasingly seen the desk as a useful source of information, and the fact that complaints are followed up on creates an atmosphere of greater transparency and accountability. The positive feedback from compliments has also had a positive influence on staff morale. The C&C desk both represents and has contributed to the excellent performance at the hospital, with Mbale hospital recently being ranked first out of all Ugandan hospitals in a government assessment of performance.¹

¹ As reported in the New Vision daily newspaper, Friday October 4, 2019, p.5

Compliments & Complaints Registered Since Start of C&C Desk



Caption: As shown in the graph, use of the C&C desk gradually increased over its first year and since then has registered between 20 and 40 compliments and complaints (combined) a month.