

# Medic beats corporates to scoop top leadership award

BY JOANNE WANJALA

He was recently named the 2013 Kirit Dave Manager of the Year during this year's edition of Company of the Year Awards (COYA) organised by the Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) and various partners. This is none other than reproductive health specialist Dr. John Ong'ech, who is also the Head of Reproductive Health Department at the biggest teaching and referral health facility in the country, Kenyatta National Hospital.

The award was introduced in remembrance of the late Kirit Dave, a successful businessman and a member of KIM Board of Fellows. This was after a thorough evaluation of Dr. Ong'ech's leadership and governance at the hospital and how his contribution has transformed the mode of operations in the organization in promoting its vision and mission.

The award has not only elevated his managerial skills but has also raised the bar for KNH, the oldest and biggest health facility that has saved the lives of many people from the entire region since its inception in 1901.

"Although I believe in transformational leadership and culture change for the better, I least expected that I could beat the more than 10 competitors mostly drawn from the corporate world," Dr. Ong'ech says during an interview with the Standard.

"Our strive is to be a world class training, research and referral Hospital. My department has for instance already set up systems to ensure that all our operations are patient-centred," notes Dr. Ong'ech.



▶ Dr. John Ong'ech

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

He says since he took over leadership as the Head of Department at the Gynecology and Obstetrics Wing in 2009, change has been evident.

"We have managed to shorten turn-around time especially in the labour wards and reduced maternal mortality by 15 per cent through several interventions," he reveals.

Some of his achievements include:

**Enhancing quality service delivery in reproductive health:** Has contributed significantly in improving Maternal newborn Health through introduction of the now famous Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV program in 2003, an initiative that has improved maternal health and minimized mother to child transmission of HIV.

**Innovations and Research:** Last year, KNH pulled a first by introducing the PartoPen and Partograph technology that is used in determining the progress of a pregnancy until the time of delivery.

This was in partnership with the University of Colorado, which now enables staff in the labour ward to use paper-based system in monitoring maternal labor, which has helped reduce life-threatening complications in pregnancy in low-resource environments.

"This software tool is one of its kind and has never been used anywhere in Africa. It has contributed to quality of care and timely decision making, which is of essence in this section," says the Doctor.

Currently, KNH's labour ward has 20 of such pens and each comes with a



Kenyatta National Hospital

charger.

The department also introduced a Hotline number in Labour ward to enhance effective communication and facilitate early referrals to KNH, thereby reducing late referrals and maternal deaths.

**The Organizational Performance Index (OPI):** He also chairs the hospital's OPI committee which has developed performance tools that to guide the hospital in enhancing competitiveness.

"Through these guidelines, this facility has improved its operations in various sectors. Several major departments have now embraced open leadership and strive towards customer satisfaction. We have also submitted our operation standards for external validation to the Joint Commission International (JCI), the highest hospital accreditation that only few hospitals in Africa have achieved," Dr. Ong'ech reveals.

## OTHER AWARDS

He has also been honoured with other

prestigious awards. He was the first Kenyan to receive Hubert Humphrey alumni impact award in recognition of his community contribution in Health, Education, mentorship and leadership.

He is the Alumnus of the coveted US Government sponsored training program dubbed Hubert H Humphrey (HHH) Fellow, becoming the first Kenyan recipient of such.

In addition, Dr. Ong'ech is also the recipient of the World Health Organization (WHO) Best Practices award after he pioneered the introduction of Intra-partum HIV Testing in 2003.

As COYA's Manager of the Year, he hopes to influence other managers especially within KNH to make the facility a model hospital and fast-track efficient service delivery.

"I believe in creating solutions to challenges. With commitment and goodwill from all, we can achieve so much."

The Board of management, management and staff of KNH congratulate Dr. Ong'ech for the award for this great honour.