

Adopt HIV-type campaign to fight cancer, says expert

BY PAUL TAJUBA
ptajuba@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. A Ugandan nutritionist and researcher based in the US has proposed that government drafts massive education messages equivalent to those targeting HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment if the country is to tame deaths caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Prof James M Ntambi, an expert in biochemistry and nutritional sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said most of NCDs are preventable but Ugandans lack the information to avert them.

"When you look at infectious diseases [such as HIV], that is where the focus for decades has been. But we now have non-communicable diseases. We need to send the messages now and make people interested in what they are eating," Prof Ntambi said.

He spoke to this reporter at the sidelines of the inaugural Uganda National Academy of Sciences lecture last week, held under the theme, "The etiology and management of the three major silent killer non-communicable diseases".

Less exercise

Prof Ntambi said Ugandans have copied foreign lifestyles, eat a lot of processed carbohydrates and exercise less, factors that have resulted in asthma, kidney, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer and obesity.

He advised Ugandans to have a balanced diet and appealed to government to recruit dieticians in all health centres who will advise patients on what to eat.

"Vegetables are crucial and available in communities but people are not eating them. Research has shown that they are really useful in our bodies," Prof Ntambi said.

One third of deaths from NCDs are premature, occurring before the age of 60.

Prof Harriet Mayanja-Kizza, the Dean of Makerere University School of Medicine, said it is costly to ignore the said diseases since they are expensive to treat.

"It is sad to ignore and then come for kidney transplant, diabetes treatments..." Prof Mayanja said.

STATISTICS

Prevalence. According to the Ministry of Health, 25 per cent of adults have hypertension, three to eight per cent have diabetes while 300 per 100,000 people have cancer. The ministry adds that 80 per cent of the people with all these conditions are ignorant. World Health Organisation statistics indicate that 36 million deaths are caused by NCDs annually-equivalent to two in every three deaths worldwide. Four in every five people with NCDs live in low and middle income countries.