

11 patients with abnormal heartbeats get treatment

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KAMPALA. Doctors at the Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) at Mulago hospital have successfully corrected heart beat abnormalities among 11 patients in a specialised procedure known as Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA).

At a press briefing at the Ministry of Health headquarters yesterday, Health Minister Jane Aceng lauded the institute for conducting another specialised heart procedure that will reduce referrals for patients with abnormal heartbeats.

According to Dr Aceng, UHI was able to carry out new procedures known as Electrophysiology study (EPS) and RFA.

"A total of 13 patients had been identified with irregular heartbeats and benefited from this procedure," Dr Aceng said.

25%

Cases. Abnormal heartbeats constitute 19 per cent of the heart disease burden worldwide while 25 per cent of the patients at the Uganda Heart Institute are seen on a daily basis.

The lead specialist cardiologist, Dr Joselyn Rwebembera, said the treatment for life-threatening irregular heartbeats is a non-surgical, minimally-invasive treatment.

"It is possible to treat such abnormal heartbeats without opening the chest. During the Electrophysiology studies (EPS), various specialised wires are inserted into the blood vessels in the groin and advanced up to the heart with the visual aid of special X-Ray cameras," Dr Rwebembera said.

She further added that wires pick signals and patterns of electric-

ity flow from different parts of the heart.

"In this way, we are able to identify the causes of the abnormal heartbeats within the heart. A special form of Electrical energy (Radiofrequency Ablation) is then delivered to stop the abnormal electrical paths," she added.

Delay to correct an irregular heart beat predisposes a patient to sudden death, Dr Rwebembera said.

She said patients were selected through a criteria based on severity of abnormal heart beat condition, risk of heart damage and sudden death.

Dr John Omagino, the UHI executive director, said all the patients worked on had been discharged.

"Today, we are privileged to have four of them and they are happy to share their experiences with the public," he said.

He said 11 patients were successfully worked upon between April 3

and 5, while two were further identified with other complications and the treatment had to be deferred to a future date.

Dr Omagino said highly specialised treatment costs about Shs18m at the heart institute compared to the cost abroad of about Shs70m.

Patient relieved

One of the patients whose irregular heartbeat was corrected testified of how radiofrequency ablation procedures conducted on April 3 had improved his well-being.

"I was first diagnosed with a very terrible blood pressure. I was recently invited for this procedure by the doctors and I am now feeling better and recovering after procedure," Mr Rahib Kiyimba, a student of Makerere University Business School, said.

Patients with irregular heartbeats, according to Dr Omagino have symp-

toms such as pounding heartbeats (palpitations), dizziness, fainting attacks and can even die if some of these irregular heartbeats are not stopped quickly.

He acknowledged the role played by Dr Mesut Demir from Istanbul, Turkey, and the Medtronic Foundation and Company for the training opportunities offered to UHI specialists to acquire these skills.

ANOTHER MILESTONE

In January this year, another team of doctors at the institute led by Dr William Manyilirah, a consultant cardiothoracic surgeon, conducted the highly specialised open-heart surgery known as coronary artery bypass grafting surgery.



Operation. Cardiologists perform a heart procedure in the catheterisation laboratory at Mulago hospital recently.

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