



UCI

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Cancer can change quickly. A patient who seemed stable at their last clinic visit may suddenly develop serious symptoms that require urgent attention. In Uganda, where many patients already present with advanced disease, delaying care until the next scheduled appointment can turn a manageable complication into a life-threatening emergency. The Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), the national referral centre for cancer care, is ready to provide immediate attention. If you feel severely unwell, do not wait; seek care immediately.

Why acting early matters

Cancer complications can escalate rapidly. Waiting for a routine review can lead to severe anaemia from ongoing bleeding, infections that progress to sepsis, spinal cord compression causing paralysis, breathing difficulties, dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, or uncontrolled pain. Early intervention can prevent permanent disability or even death. Many emergencies that appear life-threatening can be stabilised

if addressed promptly. Acting early not only saves lives but also reduces suffering and prevents complications that are harder and more expensive to treat.

Recognizing warning signs
Patients and their caregivers must be alert to sudden changes. High fever, especially during chemotherapy, difficulty breathing, sudden weakness or inability to move limbs, severe headache with confusion, persistent vomiting, heavy bleeding, sudden swelling of the face or neck, reduced urine output, and uncontrolled pain are all warning signs that demand immediate evaluation. These symptoms may indicate serious complications that cannot wait for the next scheduled clinic visit. Ignoring them

can quickly turn a manageable condition into a critical emergency.

How family, caregivers can help

Families play a crucial role in protecting patients. Many patients, particularly the elderly or children, may not fully understand the seriousness of their symptoms. Caregivers should watch for sudden changes, ensure medications are taken as prescribed, and seek professional advice without delay. Self-medication or waiting to see if symptoms resolve can be dangerous.

When in doubt, it is always safer to seek immediate medical evaluation. Being proactive can prevent avoidable emergencies and ensure patients receive time-

ly care.

Final message

Cancer does not follow appointment schedules, and emergencies can arise at any time. Prompt action can make the difference between recovery and irreversible harm. If you feel worse, even a few days after a clinic visit, go to UCI or the nearest health facility immediately.

Acting quickly saves lives, prevents complications from escalating, and improves outcomes. Your health cannot wait, when warning signs appear, every moment counts.

The writer is the executive director, Uganda Cancer Institute

Do not wait: Seek immediate care at the Uganda Cancer Institute if a patient worsens

