

# New cancer machine to shut down for servicing

**Time frame.** According to Ministry of Health officials, the designated technician from the machine manufacturer will arrive in the country on June 7 to undertake servicing.

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**KAMPALA.** Barely six months after its commissioning, the new Cobalt-60 radiotherapy cancer machine at Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), Mulago hospital will shut down on Friday this week to pave way for routine maintenance.

The Shs2 billion machine was commissioned by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, on January 19, replacing an old one that was installed more than 22 years ago, and crashed in March 2016.

In a hastily organised press conference yesterday, the acting director general of health services at the Ministry of Health, Dr Henry Mwebesa, denied claims that the cancer machine had broken down.

"We would like to inform the public that the Cobalt-60 radiotherapy machine has not broken down and fully functional," Dr Mwebesa said while responding to media reports alleging that the machine had broken down.

He said with guidance from the manufacturer, the operations of the machine had been scaled down in



**Source.** A journalist captures the new Linear Accelerator machine at the Uganda Cancer Institute in Mulago during its installation by the executive director, Dr Jackson Oryem, in January. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

preparation for its periodic servicing which is scheduled for this week.

**Warranty**

"The machine is still under warranty and therefore servicing is done for free by the manufacture," he added.

According to Dr Mwebesa, a designated technician from the machine manufacturer (UJP-Praha), Mr Pavel Cejka, has been contacted and expected to arrive in the country on June 7 to undertake servicing of the machine which will commence on June 8 and

run through the weekend of June 9 and 10.

"The new machine is a high-level and ultra-modern machine and was accepted by both the international Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Institute for Clinical Use in Octo-

ber 2017," he added.

After servicing the machine, according to Dr Mwebesa, it will resume full capacity operation of radiotherapy services on June 11.

When asked about the scale-down of services, Dr Kavuma Ausi, a senior medical physicist at the radiotherapy unit based at the UCI, said technically the machine requires to scale down its operations if it is due for servicing.

"The source is still highly reactive so we have to scale down our operations to protect the technician who will be servicing it," Dr Kavuma said.

He said the machine will operate at about 80 per cent as opposed to its daily full capacity of 150 patients per day.

**ABOUT THE MACHINE**

It was shipped from Czech Republic through Mombasa port with guidance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a United Nations body that regulates use of nuclear and atomic energy.

Purchased at 642,000 euros (more than Shs2.7b) by both government and IAEA, the machine replaced the old cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine, which broke down beyond repair on March 27, 2016.