

Mulago Hospital cancer machine to resume in December

By Vivian Agaba

The treatment of different cancers at Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) is scheduled to resume early next month when the new radiotherapy machine will be fully operational.

This means Ugandans suffering from all kinds of cancer will no longer have to travel abroad for treatment. Experts at the institute said the new modern computerised machine will also handle complicated treatments.

The incidence of cancer in Uganda, especially for breast and prostate cancer is said to have increased in the last decade by 3.7% and 5.2% respectively, annually.

Every year, the institute, which was granted autonomous status in 2014, receives over 4,500 new cancer cases. Of these, 400 are reported among children, and cumulatively, it registers between 4000-5000 patient visits every year.

Radiotherapy is a treatment involving the use of high-energy radiation to treat cancer. Almost half of all people with cancer have radiotherapy as part of their treatment plan.

Radiotherapy treatment at the institute came to a halt after the country's only radiotherapy machine broke down in April. Arrangements were made between government and the



Dr Kavuma Awusi, a senior medical physicist at the Uganda Cancer Institute, unveiling the new radiotherapy machine to the media at radiotherapy department in Mulago yesterday. Photo by Mary Kansiime

Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi to treat 400 cancer patients freely.

Addressing journalists at the institute yesterday, the executive director, Dr Jackson Orem, revealed that the institute is in the final stages of

restoring services.

He said only two phases are remaining to restore the services — testing the machine to ensure it works well according to international standards and certification from the International Atomic

Energy Agency.

"The machine is good and new, not old as some people out there were saying. We are restoring services at the institute as soon as the two phases are done, and this will be early December," he said

"Ugandans will no longer have to travel abroad for treatment as the machine also handles complicated treatments, and this will save government a lot of money spent on Ugandans travelling abroad for cancer treatment."

The Government spends close to sh30b annually on sending ministers, members of Parliament and senior government officers for treatment abroad for different ailments, excluding those who travel for treatment privately.

Dr Orem said radiotherapy treatment at UCI will be free, according to Ministry of Health guidelines, save for patients who prefer private wards.

Dr Daniel Kanyike, the head of the radiotherapy department said: "Cancer patients that were undergoing treatment at Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi under the arrangement with government will no longer be going there, they will be able to access treatment from the institute."

Dr Kavuma Awusi, a senior medical physicist at the institute, said the new machine which takes 46 seconds to treat one person, will on maximum be able to treat 100 patients in a day, unlike the old manual one which took 260 seconds and worked on 80 people in 24 hours.

"This will help us provide efficient and more improved service delivery," he said

UCI has started receiving and registering patients who will undergo radiotherapy treatment when the machine starts operating on the first-come first-served basis.