

President Yoweri Museveni (wearing army uniform) with a group of investors from the Republic of Sudan who want to invest in processing, farming, e-waste, banking and insurance, chicken hatchery and construction. The group comprised Abbarci Osman Siddig, Walls Petroleum company led by Mohamed Omar, Kampal Limited led by Yasir Kampal for food processing and

CANCER MACHINE LAUNCHED

BY JOHN AGABA

Prime minister Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda commissioned the new Cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine on Friday, amid calls for more cancer doctors in the country to effectively manage the disease whose incidences shot up by more than half in last decade.

The old cancer machine, which handled more than 17,000 patients annually, broke down in March 2016 after serving more than 21 years.

Following the unprecedented crisis in cancer management in the country, the health ministry entered an agreement with the Aga Khan Hospital in Kenya so patients screened and in need of radiotherapy could be rushed to the facility in Nairobi for treatment.

The Aga Khan University Hospital agreed to treat 400 patients freely.

Now, after almost 20 months the country has commissioned a new one.

Ruhakana Rugunda said the restoration of radiotherapy services in Uganda "indeed a major step" in the treatment of cancer in the country and a cause for celebration.

"It is not just the restoration of radiotherapy services. The machine is ultra, is an upgrade, and matches latest technology for cancer treatment," the prime minister, who was chief guest at the function at the Uganda Cancer Institute at Mulago, said.

Unlike the old machine, Dr. Kavuma Awusi, a senior medical physicist at the institute, said the new machine was highly sophisticated and computerised and is extremely adjustable to locate and treat exact cancer tumours.

It will improve the precision and efficiency with which treatment is offered, he said.

"The old machine would take 260 seconds to treat one patient.



PHOTO BY MARY KANSIIME

Director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency Ambassador Yukiya Amano and Rugunda commissioning radiotherapy Machine at Uganda Cancer Institute in Mulago

The new machine will require a maximum of 45 seconds. It can treat more than 80 patients a day," the health minister Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng said.

"The machine uses the latest technology in cancer treatment and is new, not old as some have been reporting (in the media). We are restoring radiotherapy services at the facility," the minister said adding that the services will be free.

The machine was procured from UJP Praha, a multi-technology company in Czech Republic, which deals in nuclear, industrial and medical equipment.

The machine cost Euros 664,830 (about sh2.9b), with part of the money a contribution from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The machine was delivered at the Institute in August 2017, upon completion of the bunker that would accommodate it. It was then installed and has been doing tests before the commissioning.

"The commissioning of the new cancer machine gives hope to cancer patients in the country," Institute executive director Dr.

Jackson Orem said.

Almost half of all patients with cancer have radiotherapy as part of their treatment. But Orem said the Institute and Uganda needed more cancer doctors, much as trainings (to increase the number) were underway.

He said the UCI had 30 trained oncologists, but the number was strained compared to the ever increasing cancer incidents and disease burden in the country.

He said Uganda registered 320 new cancer cases in every 100,000 patients today, compared to ten years ago when it only registered 120 new cases per 100,000.

Dr Aceng said they will continue training oncologists to ensure the country has enough experts to handle the disease. Construction of additional bunkers at Mulago is also underway to make UCI the "East African centre of excellence" in cancer management.

On funding, Aceng said UCI was made an autonomous entity in 2014 so it can generate own funds while at the same time receiving monies from government.

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