

By Cecilia Okoth

The Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, has called on development partners to help in the fight against cancer, by providing financial and technical support.

Speaking at the opening of the seventh joint international conference on cancer and palliative care at the Commonwealth Resort, Munyonyo yesterday, Rugunda said whereas the Government is committed to 'lessening' the burden of cancer in the country, it cannot single-handedly address the problem.

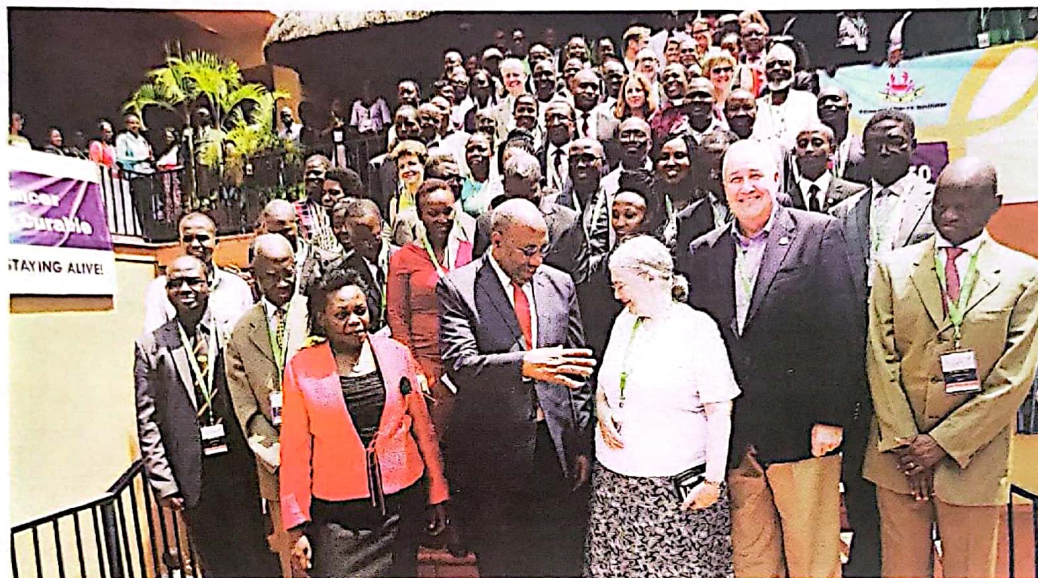
"As you are aware, we have limited resources, which are shared among the competing priority areas. We can only win the cancer battle if we work together, by pooling our financial, technical and infrastructure resources and using them more effectively and efficiently," he said.

"Cancer is a big problem, affecting people of any social status. We cannot address it alone. Therefore, your commitment as service providers, advocates, affected patients, families, educators and development partners is indispensable," he added.

Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) and the Palliative Care Association of Uganda (PCAU) together with the Aga Khan University Hospital, Nairobi (AKUHN) organised the conference with the focus on the spectrum of the continuum of cancer care from prevention to end of the life care. This year's theme is "United against cancer: prevention to end of life care".

In May this year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) unanimously adopted a resolution on cancer treatment globally. The resolution made to help boost cancer treatment efforts, provides guidance on health promotion and risk factor reduction, as well as the need to address inequity in access to early detection and appropriate treatment, including

PM Rugunda implores partners in cancer fight



Rugunda talks to the director of Hospice Mbale, Jane White. Looking on are global partner Michael Wargon (second-right), Uganda Cancer Institute director Jackson Orem (right) and the state minister for health, Sarah Opendi (on Rugunda's right). This was after the launch of a conference on cancer and palliative care, at Speke Resort Munyonyo, yesterday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

pain relief and palliative care. It also emphasises prevention and timely access to treatment and care.

In his keynote address, Prof. Charles Olweny, the Board Chair of UCI, said cancer being expensive, calls for focus on prevention through vaccination, screening and palliative care.

He said whereas 10 million new cases of cancer were registered

globally in 2000, the figures are likely to shoot up to 15 million in 2020, 60% of which will occur in developing countries.

According to Olweny, a lot of attention should be paid to prostate cancer, Kaposi sarcoma and cancer of the oesophagus among men and cervical cancer, breast cancer and kaposi sarcoma among women,

which he said are on the rise.

"Kaposi Sarcoma, for example, which was rare in the 1960s, is on the rise today, because it is related to HIV/AIDS. We have also seen cancer of the oesophagus, bladder and lungs increase due to the use of tobacco, which is the largest preventable cause of cancer," he said.

Olweny called for the enforcement

of the ban of cigarette smoking, saying tobacco is the only consumer product that kills 50% of its users.

Dr John Weru, a consultant palliative medicine specialist at AKUHN, said there was need to address pain that is associated with cancer saying one of the major concerns and beliefs by patients and families is that pain will definitely occur and will become untreated or will be poorly controlled.

"Pain is recognised as an important symptom and indicator of poor quality of life. It is so common and feared that it is the main reason patients buy prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications. Therefore, a holistic assessment and attention is important to its treatment," Weru said.

However, Dr Sam Guma, the PCAU Board chairperson, noted that whereas oral morphine, used in the management of pain for cancer patients, used to be administered by doctors, nurses and clinical officers trained in palliative care, the New Narcotic and Psychotropic Act passed by Parliament in 2015 repealed the process. The law was passed to control drug trafficking into the country.

"Legally, medical doctors are the ones known to administer the drug, but, as you know we do not have doctors in all corners of the country, hence the need to allow the nurses and clinical officers," he said.

Statistics from UCI indicate that the institute receives over 200 cancer patients daily. The common cancer cases in Uganda include cervical cancer, which affects 48 per every 100,000 women; breast cancer at 45 per every 100,000 women; prostate cancer that affects 45 per every 100,000 men and Kaposi sarcoma which affects for 35 per every 100,000. Others are throat cancer affects 25 per 100,000 people, liver cancer affects 15 per every 100,000 people and cancer of the stomach which affects 12 per every 100,000.