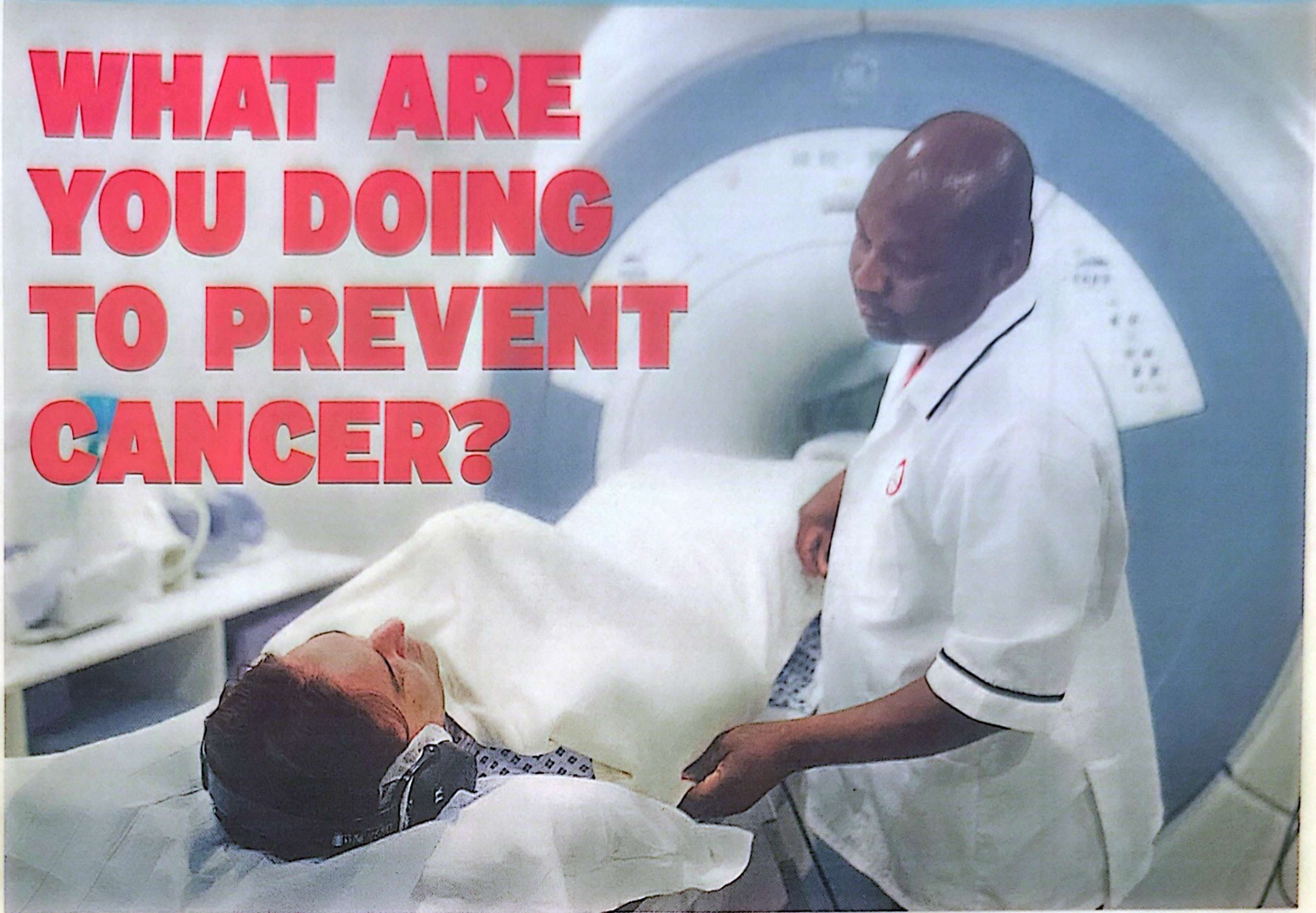


WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO PREVENT CANCER?



BY JACKY ACHAN

Cancer, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), is the second leading cause of death globally and was responsible for 8.8 million deaths in 2015 alone.

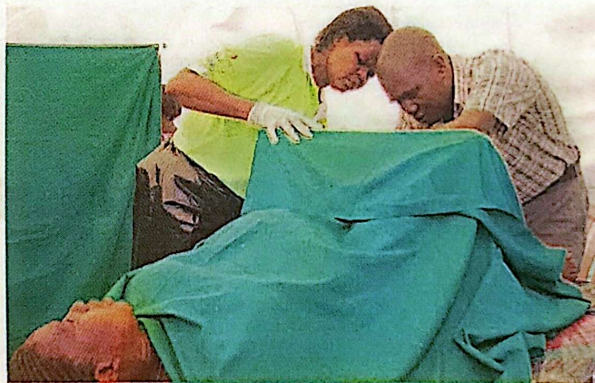
WHO states that globally, nearly one in six deaths is due to cancer and approximately 70% of the deaths from cancer occur in low and middle-income countries.

According to Dr Henry Ddungu, a consultant in haematology/oncology at the Uganda Cancer Institute, out of every 100,000 Ugandans, 300 have cancer.

"Last year alone, the cancer institute received over 4,000 new cancer cases. Prostate cancer is highly prevalent in men, while breast and cervical cancers in women are also high," he says.

"However, unlike prostate cancer, many of these others, including cervical and liver cancers, stem mainly from infections such as hepatitis and human papilloma virus (HPV)," Ddungu adds.

He, however, notes that cancer is not caused by a particular element, but many, including



underlying conditions and lifestyle choices.

"If you have many sexual partners, for example, you increase your chances of developing cancer through infections. Lifestyle choices such as smoking, lack of exercise and

poor eating habits can also lead to cancer," he says.

Ddungu says the state of hopelessness that is associated with cancer in Uganda is worrying. He says of the 300 people who develop

A woman undergoing cervical cancer tests during a health camp. Experts say deaths are high among cancer patients because most people only go to hospital when the disease is in its advanced stages

cancer every year, few go for treatment. "Some people tell cancer patients not to take cancer drugs, claiming the treatment will kill them, only to offer the patient concoctions which do not help," he says.

Ddungu says 80% of cancer patients only go to hospitals when the disease is in its advanced stage when it is difficult to treat.

Cancer in children

Dr Joseph Lubega, a child cancer specialist, says unlike in adults, there is no known reason why children develop cancer.

Of the over 4,000 new cancer cases registered in Uganda last year, 12% were children, according to Dr Joyce Kambu, an oncologist at the cancer institute.

The most common cancers seen in children were leukaemia (cancer of the blood), kidney and muscle cancers.

But cancers may occur in children as a result of tumours they are born with on the face and other areas of the body, combined with infections such as HIV or malaria.

Continued on page 30

VIEWPOINT

Early diagnosis key in the cancer fight

Yesterday was World Cancer Day, which is dedicated to raising awareness about one of most dreaded diseases in the world.

Cancer, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), is the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for nearly one in six deaths. Statistics from WHO also show that approximately 70% of deaths from cancer occur in low and middle-income countries.

Out of every 100,000 people in Uganda, about 500 have cancer, of which very few seek treatment, according to statistics from the Uganda Cancer Institute. The majority of these seek treatment when the disease is in its advanced stages and difficult to treat.

Children have not been spared. Of the over 4,000 new cancer cases registered in Uganda last year, 12% were children.

These statistics could be scary, but officials from the health ministry say a number of cancers are preventable and curable once detected early and treated.

There is also hope that the cancer burden can be reduced if individuals play their role in changing their lifestyle, focus on prevention, go for early diagnosis and treatment.

The global theme for this year's World Cancer Day 'as We can. I can, which calls for each individual to play their part to reduce the global burden of the disease.

Health & beauty team

Adjustment in lifestyle habits can reduce the risk of cancer

Between 30-50% of all cancer cases are preventable. Prevention offers the most cost-effective long-term strategy for the control of cancer and this can be done through lifestyle adjustments as discussed below.

- Tobacco smoking causes many types of cancers, including cancers of the lungs, oesophagus, larynx (voice box), mouth, throat, kidney, bladder, pancreas, stomach and

- cervix. Second-hand smoke, also known as environmental tobacco smoke, has been proven to cause lung cancer in non-smoking adults.
- Dietary modification is another important approach to cancer control. There is a link between overweight and obesity to many types of cancer, such as oesophagus,

colorectum, breast, endometrium and kidney. Diets high in fruits and vegetables may have an independent

protective effect against many cancers. Regular physical activity and the maintenance of a healthy body weight, along with a healthy diet, can reduce cancer risk.

- Alcohol use is also a risk factor for many cancer types, including cancer of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver, colorectum and breast. The risk of cancer increases with the amount of alcohol consumed.



Eating fruits and vegetables is said to lower the risk of cancer

From page 29

But with improved treatment of these two conditions, the cases are rare. It makes for just about 10% of cancers in children, according to the experts.

Luckily, cancer is more curable in children than in adults, according to Lubega.

"This is because children's bodies are more responsive to treatment, unlike adults," Lubega explains.

Ddungu says it is important to note that early detection and treatment is important in the cancer fight and prevents unnecessary loss of life.

Cancer challenge in Uganda

On March 27, 2016, Uganda's only radiotherapy machine broke down beyond repair. In the absence of the cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine, patients were advised to travel to Nairobi, in neighbouring Kenya, for treatment.

Those who could not afford to go to Nairobi were put on chemotherapy treatment, surgery and palliative care. Others died.

This sparked an uproar among Ugandans. The breakdown was seen as a symbol of the deterioration of Uganda's medical services.

The Government was forced to purchase a new modern cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine. Eventually, in August last year, the new machine purchased at more than sh.2.7b by both the government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), arrived in the country.

This month, the Government commissioned the new cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine, two years after the previous one broke down, restoring hope to cancer patients and their families.

Changing mindset

Yesterday was World Cancer Day. The day was marked under the theme, "We Can. I Can." It explores how we can all take part in reducing the global cancer burden.

Innovations in cancer treatment

Dr Henry Ddungu, a consultant in haematology/oncology at the Uganda Cancer Institute, says much as they are still using old-fashioned treatment, Uganda Cancer Institute is moving towards improving treatment for cancer.

The most common form of treatment for cancer, according to Ddungu, is drugs, radiotherapy and surgery.

But today, there is targeted therapy, which is a type of treatment that helps stop cancer from growing and spreading.

The therapy drugs target specific genes or proteins found in cancer cells or in cells related to cancer growth, such as those

in the blood vessels.

There is also immunotherapy/biologic therapy. Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that boosts the body's natural defences to fight the cancer.

It uses substances made by the body or in a laboratory to improve or restore immune system functions.

Ddungu explains that these therapies are better and eliminate side-effects such as loss of hair during treatment.

"Some of these treatments are already in the country, but there are also plans and efforts to immunise children to eliminate cancers caused through infections in years ahead," he says.



The cancer institute is looking to improve cancer treatment through modern drugs and equipment

Matthew Kabalega, the head of communications at the Uganda Cancer Society, says cancer is still a grey area for many people.

"There is not a lot of information out there. People think when they get cancer, their life is over, but that is not true. There is need to create awareness so that people know that

with early detection and treatment they can be healed of cancer," he says.

Dr Charles Olaro, the director of clinical services at the health ministry, says a number of cancers can be prevented because they stem from infections and can be cured if treated early.

Easing treatment

Globally, the ideal is one radiotherapy machine for every 250,000 people, but Uganda, with a population of over 40 million people, just has one.

Ddungu says the new modern cobalt 60 radiotherapy cancer machine, although it works well, the demand is overwhelming. He says they are in the process of getting more machines.

"We are planning to get four linear accelerators, which are used for external beam radiation treatments for patients with cancer," he says.

They also plan to acquire a brachytherapy machine. Brachytherapy involves radiation delivered from a tiny source, implanted directly into or next to the tumour.

This treatment reduces damage to the surrounding healthy tissue, thereby limiting side-effects.

Ddungu says there are also plans for regional cancer centres to manage cancer screening and treatment better.

"There is a centre in Mbarara, others in Arua, Gulu and Mbale which are being developed and equipped to become regional cancer centres," he says.



Experts advise early detection through checkups to successfully treat cancer and avoid death

WARDS ZERO

We are both positive but my wife refuses to get on ARVs

Doctor, I can be done to help my wife, HIV-positive, but refuses to be treated? I am HIV-positive and on ARVs for six months now doing well, with my viral load low. I am worried because my wife cannot stand taking drugs, is not sick, on top of having to attend clinic every month to get the drugs.

Dear Aaron, Since HIV treatment is for life, your wife needs to be given time to make up her mind, so that when she starts the treatment, she will not stop or keep missing doses.

It is possible she has not yet accepted the fact that she is HIV-positive and so continues living in denial, which is common when people are confronted with bad news, such as being told they have HIV.

Many people, on learning they are HIV-positive, go through stages of anger, denial and bargaining, before they accept that they have

the disease and start living positively.

Positive living, which many people living with HIV have adopted, includes accepting that one has the disease and seeking early care and treatment, which includes taking ARVs daily, not because one is feeling unwell, but to prevent the possibility of becoming sick or developing AIDS in future.

Since you are on ARVs and doing well, continue sharing with her your experience of taking ARVs daily and how your viral load is now undetectable, so that she can see that being on ARVs is not as bad as she thinks.

This is known as peer counselling, which many people living with HIV have used to help others struggling with stigma and denial.

Lastly, people living with HIV, who are on ARVs, do not have to attend clinics monthly, because once their viral load is suppressed, they do not have to see a doctor frequently, I can just collect their drugs every three or four months, which surely is not bad, considering the benefits of being on ART.

Question answered
Dr. Stephen W