

Patients decry high cost of kidney treatment at Kiruddu

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KAMPALA. Patients with kidney failure conditions in the country risk a faster death, after several of them withdrawing from dialysis whose cost at Kiruddu Hospital has since shot from Shs60,000 to Shs206,000 per session, far beyond their reach.

Dialysis is a treatment that filters and purifies the blood using a machine which helps to keep one's body in balance when the kidneys fail to filter waste products from the blood.

Dr Peter Eyoku, the Head of Mulago's Renal Unit, which has since shifted to Kiruddu Hospital, said patients ordinarily paid a subsidised Shs60,000 fees only for accessing the dialysis machine until the shortage of reagents struck in February this year.

"Patients now have to buy the materials themselves which brings the cost to about Shs200,000... for the last three years, we had regular deliveries, until early this year when supplies became irregular," Dr Eyoku said in a phone interview, referring this newspaper to Mulago hospital administrators and the National Medical Stores (NMS) for an explanation.

The reagents, which are out of stock, include; the dialyser (artificial kidney), sodium bicarbonate and heparin (avoids blood clots).

Dr Eyoku explained that patients with chronic kidney failure risk death within a few days after stopping dialysis while those with acute kidney failure (reversible) risk advancing to chronic failure and also die a few months after stopping dialysis.

Mulago Hospital started subsidising dialysis in 2013 after realising that patients with kidney failure died prematurely because they could not afford the weekly cost of dialysis which by then was at Shs90,000 for accessing the machine. The patients on top of



Sick. A health worker attends to a patient on a dialysis machine. Because such specialised care is limited in the country, many patients end up seeking services abroad. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

that also had to buy other reagents.

Kiruddu General Hospital in Kampala is the only government facility that has until recently been providing dialysis services at a subsidised fee of Shs60,000 until the facility ran out of reagents.

With the new development, a patient has to part with Shs412,000 on a weekly basis for the procedure carried out twice every week as opposed to the medically recommended three, due to the large numbers competing for only 16 machines.

A sense of hopelessness lingers on Mr Patrick Seruyange, 30, a patient at Kiruddu Hospital, who has been surviving on dialysis since December 2014, whenever he fails to raise money for his weekly sessions.

Mr Seruyange says he is sometimes forced to skip sessions because he cannot afford the high expense which

leaves him in severe pain.

Mr Seruyange's condition is not different from that of the other patients who have since resigned back to their homes while others have dropped dead.

"The accumulation of the toxins in the body makes you feel sick, weak, loss of appetite, swelling of the feet, muscle pool and loss of energy...you sometimes feel you want to give up on life," PATRICK SERUYANGE, PATIENT

The cost of dialysis is much higher in private health facilities with the service now costing between Shs270,000 and Shs600,000 per session.

Although the number of those who

undergo dialysis at Kiruddu Hospitals had increased from 30 patients before the treatment was subsidised in 2013 to 130 in 2016, the number has since reduced to the current 110 patients.

However, delivery invoices showed to *Daily Monitor* by NMS, indicate that the last delivery of the materials was done on July 27.

Mr Moses Kamabare, the executive director of NMS denied failure to deliver the reagents at any one moment saying the renal unit ought to find out from the hospital why they have not received them.

Dr Charles Kabugo, the director of Kiruddu Hospital, also refused to comment on the matter referring us to Mulago Hospitals to inquire whether they have been receiving the reagents.

Mr Enock Kusasira, the Mulago Hospital spokesperson, admitted receiving the reagents but few.