

Cancer machine off for service

By Violet Nabatanzi

The radiotherapy machine at Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) has been switched off to allow for routine maintenance service.

A senior medical physicist at the radiotherapy department, Dr Awusi Kavuma, said an expert was due in Uganda later in the day to kick off the repairs tomorrow.

"We had planned to start servicing the cancer machine today, but the expert was delayed," Kavuma explained.

Speaking in a phone interview Kavuma said the maintenance works could last three days.

"The works are meant to be completed on Sunday, but we might probably go up to Monday. However, it will not affect patients who will be treated the following day," he noted.

Servicing

Early this week, Kavuma said they can only accommodate 80% of the total number of patients they have been treating on a daily basis.

He said the radioactive source is still high and that is why they want to reduce it, so that the technician is able to work.

Kavuma added that the machine, according to the manufacturer's guidelines, is supposed to be serviced every six months.

Recently, the acting director general of health services, Dr Henry Mwebesa, said the machine is still functioning, though not at full capacity.

"The machine is still under warranty. Therefore, it is serviced free of charge by the manufacturer. The machine was approved by both the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Institute for Clinical Use," he said.

In numbers

Mwebesa said since the machine was installed in November last year, the number of patients treated per day increased from 10 in December, to 150, while the number of treatment sessions rose from about 20 to 300 daily.

Mwebesa said about 1,000 patients have been treated since the restoration of radiotherapy services at UCI and about 15,000 treatment sessions had been done.

According to UCI, over 4,000 new cancer cases were registered in Uganda last year, with prostate cancer ranking high in men, whereas breast and cervical cancer were leading in women. Out of every 100,000 people in Uganda, 300 are suspected to have cancer.

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