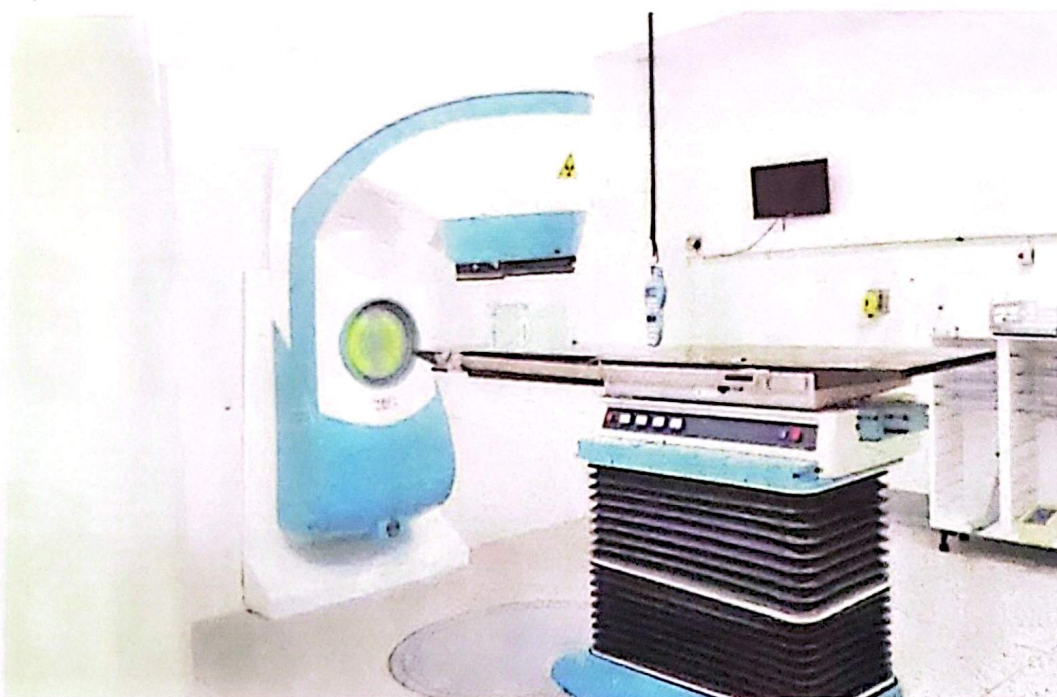


Cancer machine ready, awaits commissioning



New. The newly-installed cancer machine at Mulago Cancer Institute. PHOTO BY EMMANUEL AINEBYOONA

Overdue. Installation of the machine has taken nearly two months since it was imported into the country in August from the Czech Republic in Europe.

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KAMPALA. The long-awaited cancer machine has finally been installed but users will have to wait a little longer as government organizes its official commissioning.

Despite Health minister Jane Aceng indicating that the machine will be ready this month, *Daily Monitor* understands that the new Cobalt-60 radiotherapy

machine might only become accessible to patients early next year.

A source, who preferred anonymity in order to speak freely, said: "The machine has been fully installed and ready to work, but we are told the administration is working on the official commissioning process before we start treating patients."

It was also revealed that the source for the machine manufactured in December last year has already started to decay even before being utilised. The source emits radioactive rays to the part of the body with cancerous cells.

BACKGROUND

The machine. Bought at Euros 642,000 (about Shs2.7b) by both the government and IAEA, the new machine replaces the old Cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine, which broke down beyond repair in March last year, leaving more than 2,000 cancer patients without proper treatment, with some hundreds dying of the disease.

"The decay means that the source will lose its strength as the reactive source decays by 1.5 per cent every month," he added.

Installation of the machine has taken nearly two months since it was imported into the country in August from the Czech Republic in Europe.

The director of the Mulago-based Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI), Dr Jackson Orem, said he will address a press conference on Monday to update the country on the status of the cancer machine, saying it is not yet ready for use.

He said the machine is yet to be accredited by the Atomic Energy Council (AEC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) based in Austria.

But, a source indicated that officials at the AEC, which sits at the Health ministry and licenses, as well as regulates atomic and nuclear energy, were invited to inspect the machine but are yet to show up.

However, Mr Deogratius Lwalira, the AEC executive secretary, said his entity had not yet received any letter inviting them to inspect the newly installed cancer machine.

"Let them produce evidence of a letter inviting us to inspect the machine," he said.

On her part, the Health State minister, Ms Joyce Kaducu, said the commissioning of the machine had not been discussed because her team was preoccupied with emergency response to the marburg outbreak in Kween District.