

Uganda Heart Institute wants two helicopters

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THE Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) has asked government to provide it with two helicopters to deal with emergencies. John Omagino, the institute's director, has said.

"The challenge we are facing as a country is that we have one catheterisation laboratory. We need a service that will handle the many heart emergencies in the country while linking them to this one centre. We are lobbying for two helicopters to save the lives of our patients," Omagino noted during a meeting at the Kampala Serena Hotel recently.

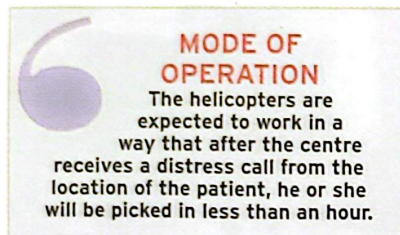
A catheterisation lab is an examination room in a hospital with diagnostic imaging equipment used to visualise the arteries of the heart and the chambers of the heart, and treat any abnormality that is detected.

The helicopters are expected to work in a way that after the centre receives a distress call from the location of the patient, he or she will be picked in less than an hour.

"The helicopter crew will be sent immediately, the patient will then be hoisted and transferred to a ground ambulance or hospital," Omagino explained.

Helicopters are known for speed over long distances, access to remote areas such as mountainous ones and over large water expanses. They also need smaller landing space and can land closer to or at hospitals.

Research shows that early treatment for a



heart attack can prevent or limit damage to the heart muscle.

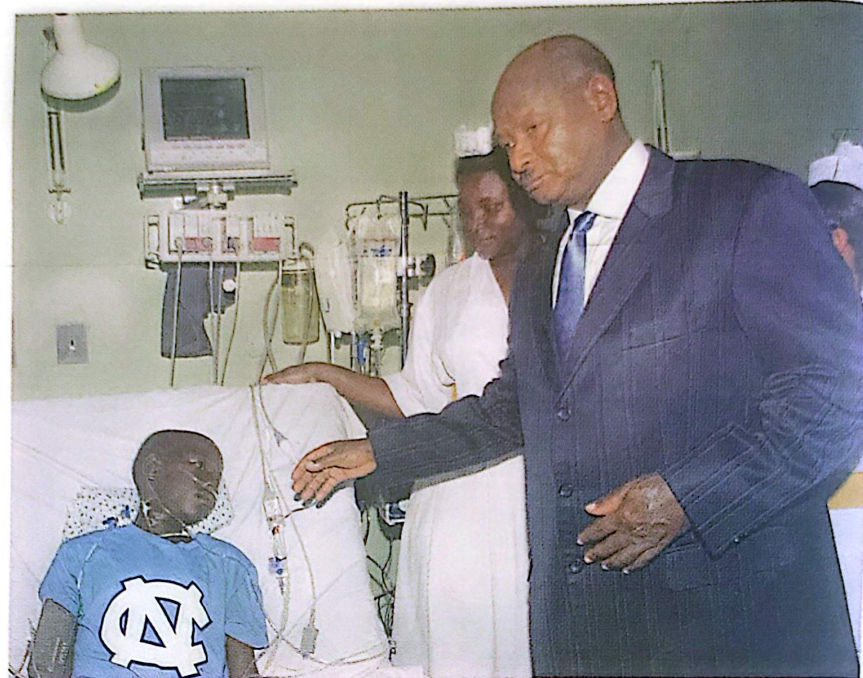
The crew, according to Omagino, will comprise the safety officer in charge of the emergency medical treatment, and a hoist operator in case of inaccessibility to the location of the patient.

Recently, UHI started a collaboration coined 'Uganda Stem Network' with 12 hospitals to manage emergencies in the shortest time with the aim of reducing deaths from heart attacks.

At the specified hospitals, a patient diagnosed with a heart problem will be reported to the UHI and arrangements to treat the patient, including flying him or her to the institute, will be made immediately.

Apart from the army, the Police is the other government entity that has helicopters. The cost of flying the patients has not been determined by the institute.

Although these helicopters are tasked with performing a wide range of missions, including law enforcement and emergency medical



President Yoweri Museveni checking on one of the heart patients during the commissioning of the Uganda Heart Institute in 2007. The institute wants to acquire a chopper which will ease the provision of medical care

services, Omagino feels the agencies are overwhelmed by work. He argues that heart problems in the country need stand-alone helicopters for the job, if the successes of the institute are to be manifested.

Omagino also said the helicopters would work with backing of the ambulances, which the institute hopes to get after liaising with the Police.

The selected hospitals to work with UHI in management of heart attacks include Mulago Hospital, China Friendship Hospital Naguru, Rubaga, Nsambya, Kibuli, Victoria Hospital and Norvic hospitals.

■ HOW THE NETWORK WILL WORK

"At the specified hospitals, a patient diagnosed with a heart problem will be reported to the UHI and arrangements will then be made to treat the patient," Omagino said.

Omagino added that at the moment, nurses are undergoing training on how to use electrocardiogram (ECG) on patients. An electrocardiogram is a test that checks for problems with the electrical activity of a person's heart.

He added that "within 30 minutes or less, treatment should begin from the start of heart attack symptoms."

■ SYMPTOMS OF HEART ATTACK

Pain in the centre of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes and discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck jaw or below the breastbone.

Others are shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort and feeling unusually tired for no reason, among others.

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