

**Extortion.** Patients say they are charged between Shs300,000 and Shs500,000 to book for treatment but they are given receipts for only Shs5,000 or Shs70,000.

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**KAMPALA.** Patients at the Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) are in tears for lack of medical care due to the breakdown of the radiotherapy machine and wanton extortion by medical officers who charge excessive illegal fees before dispensing drugs or treatment.

Government imported the new Cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine last August to replace the old one, which had broken down two years before, leaving more than 2,000 cancer patients at God's mercy.

However, the new machine broke down two weeks ago, hardly six months after its installation last December, and cancer patients are stranded because they cannot access radiotherapy treatment which they critically need.

It's double jeopardy. Their plight has been escalated by apparent extortionist medical personnel at the cancer hospital.

The officials at UCI have introduced exorbitant charges before patients can access the radiotherapy machine. The charges are in respect of consultation and treatment fees but the money is not receipted as paid by patients.

One of the UCI receipts, which *Daily Monitor* has seen, indicated that a cancer patient had been charged Shs5,000 for consultation fees.

#### Charges

However, the patient said they are charged between Shs300,000 and Shs500,000 to book for treatment or to be given priority attention but they are given receipts for only Shs5,000 or Shs70,000.

Some patients said they are also required to pay Shs50,000 per session of radiotherapy treatment.

Ms Christine Namulindwa, the UCI public relations Officer, confirmed the payment of fees but declined to divulge on the rates or how the money is paid.

# Medics fleece patients as cancer machine breaks down



**Demonstration.** The senior medical physicist at Uganda Cancer Institute, Dr Kavuma Ausi, demonstrates to journalists how the new cancer machine operates after its installation last year. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

"The fees are there but they are being piloted. Details will be given by the executive director," Ms Namulindwa told *Daily Monitor*.

She declined to comment on the accusations that patients are charged higher fees but given receipts for lower amount.

She said only UCI executive director Dr Jackson Orem could comment on such an issue. Dr Orem was reportedly out of the country.

Ms Namulindwa denied the radiotherapy machine broke down. She insisted the machine is operational but they had only reduced on the number of patients being handled to 20 per cent with priority to emergency cases pending the routine servicing that begins tomorrow.

However, sources at UCI told *Daily Monitor* that the machine broke down, contrary to the hospital man-

agement's statement.

"That machine started breaking down in the first two weeks after it was shipped into the country. It [the new machine] seems older than the one they replaced," one of the nurses at the UCI radiotherapy unit at Old Mulago told *Daily Monitor*.

#### Machine breakdown

A patient of throat cancer from Bushenyi District told *Daily Monitor* the medics at the radiotherapy unit on Monday asked him to return home because the machine had broken down.

Although UCI management had invited journalists to the radiotherapy unit to demonstrate that the machine was functioning, some patients said that shortly after the press had left, they were told the machine had developed a technical problem and they

would be wasting time to remain at the hospital. "We were asked to return home until further notice," said a patient who declined to be named for fear of victimisation.

When *Daily Monitor* visited UCI yesterday morning, only a handful of patients were seen waiting at the radiotherapy room but it was not readily established whether they received treatment.

One of the patients who accessed the radiotherapy room, said the doctor instead examined him and he was not fit for the treatment. The doctor prescribed for medicine he would buy until the appointment.

A source at UCI concurred with the patients that the machine broke down and said queuing up purporting to be waiting for treatment was "playing a game".