

Mulago to start kidney transplants this year

By Violet Nabatanzi

Patients with kidney failure will have no reason to travel abroad for treatment as Mulago Hospital is set to carry out kidney transplants starting this year.

At the moment, at least 100 patients with kidney ailments are treated from the facility.

The executive director of Mulago Hospital, Dr Baterana Byarugaba, said kidney transplants will start in September, after the hospital renovations that have been going on for the last two years are completed. He said introducing kidney transplants is aimed at reducing the

number of people seeking treatment abroad. "I believe the number of referrals abroad will reduce by 50% because what has been causing patients to go for further treatment will be done from this facility," he said.

He said the facility will also manage other organ transplants such as bone marrow, cornea and hip replacement.

According to experts, kidney failure is common in patients who have lived with hypertension and diabetes for over 30 years.

The symptoms include swelling of legs and ankles, a reduced amount of urine, shortness of breath, excessive drowsiness or fatigue and

persistent nausea.

Dr Dan Kiggundu, of the Renal Unit at Mulago, said they register 15 to 16 new cases of patients for dialysis monthly. Many patients come from Burundi, Kenya, DR Congo and South Sudan.

Dialysis is a procedure that removes waste products and excess fluid from the blood when the kidneys stop working properly.

At Mulago, each time a patient undergoes dialysis, they pay sh60,000 and it is done twice a week. In private hospital, the cost can go up to sh2m per week.

With poorly equipped health centres and the best doctors

leaving the country for greener pastures, wealthy business people and public officials have been travelling abroad for advanced treatment.

According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda loses over \$150m (about sh500b)

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Kidney failure, also known as renal failure, is a medical condition in which the kidneys fail to adequately filter waste products from the blood. To learn more, visit: <https://www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/understandinglabvalues>

to medical tourism abroad. Specialised cancer treatment, heart surgery, and internal organ transplants are the most common services Ugandans usually seek from India, South Africa and other developed countries.

In 2014, President Museveni officially launched the re-modelling of Mulago Hospital. The rehabilitation of the hospital will cost \$29m (about sh103b) while the new equipment will cost \$20m (about sh71b).

The money is part of a loan facility from the African Development Bank (AfDB) to increase access to quality and affordable healthcare services in Kampala.

Byarugaba said the renovation of the hospital is expected to be completed by July this year. He added that in May the 110 housing units for health workers will also be completed.

The hospital will also have new services, including digitalisation of patients' data and tele-medicine. Tele-medicine is the use of telecommunication and information technology to provide clinical healthcare at a distance.

The state minister for health, Sarah Opendi, recently said the technology will save patients the cost of travelling abroad seeking further treatment, adding that this will improve healthcare in the country.