

Common cases. Cervical cancer among women and prostate cancer among men have the highest prevalence rate.

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KAMPALA. As government commissions the new Cobalt 60 radiotherapy machines today, the Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) has revealed that the number of new cancer cases registered annually has shot up by 500, rising from 4,000 in 2016 to 4,500 in 2017.

The cancer institute currently treats about 48,500 patients, with 75 per cent of them receiving radiotherapy treatment.

Ms Christine Namulindwa, the UCI spokesperson, said cervical cancer among women and prostate cancer among men have the highest prevalence rate, with leukemia most prevalent among children.

"Numbers are increasing because of the increasing risk factors [like tobacco, infections and diet] and many people are now aware. But these also report in their advanced stages," Ms Namulindwa said.

Accompanied by the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano, the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, is expected to officiate at the commissioning of the new radiotherapy machine at UCI at Mulago, Kampala, today.

Ms Namulindwa also said no patients will be charged for accessing the machine as had been speculated, saying the cost of maintaining the machine were already covered during the purchase and that its technicians are available in the country.

"We now expect better services," Ms Namulindwa added.

Cancer cases rise as govt launches new machine



Treatment: The new linear accelerator machine at the Uganda Cancer Institute, Mulago was shown to journalists last year. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

Considering that government spends between Shs8 million and Shs10 million, Dr Fred Okuku, the head of department, private wing at UCI, said the increment in the number of patients means government will have to part with more money.

"Working on just one patient takes a lot, including several tests like CT scan for the abdomen [computed tomography used to produce cross-section of specific areas of a scanned body part], blood, the heart, ears and the subsequent drugs for chemotherapy and radiotherapy combined," Dr Okuku said.

The institute on December 4

MORE EFFICIENT

Dr Jackson Orem, the executive director of UCI, promised more efficiency as the new machine uses a maximum of 45 seconds to treat one patient compared to four minutes taken by the old one. "It will improve the precision and efficiency with which the treatment is offered," Dr Orem said last year. The new machine also handles between 80 and 100 patients in three shifts daily compared to the old one which handled 100 patients both day and night.

resumed radiotherapy services, which involve damaging cancer cells and stopping them from growing and dividing by use of high-energy rays as opposed to chemotherapy which involves the use of a combination of drugs to kill the cancer cells.

The launch of the country's only radiotherapy machine comes after nearly two years since the old Cobalt 60 machine broke down beyond repair in March 2016.

Ms Ketty Acios, 36, with stage three cervical cancer, said the restoration of the radiotherapy machine was a great relief from both financial and physical costs of chemotherapy.