

International conference on cancer begins tomorrow

By Cecilia Okoth

To mark the beginning of this year's joint international conference on cancer and palliative care, a health camp targeting patients with breast cancer shall be set up to provide treatment.

According to Prof. Ronald Wasike, a consultant breast surgeon at the Aga Khan University Hospital, Nairobi, the treatment (breast conserving therapy) will be part of the discussions scheduled to take place at the seventh joint conference organised by Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) and the Palliative Care Association of Uganda.

The meeting, which begins

today and ends on Friday at the Commonwealth Resort, Munyonyo, a Kampala suburb, comes after UCI marked 50 years of cancer research, treatment and training in Uganda, two weeks ago.

Breast conserving therapy (BCT) is the process of removing part of the breast that contains the tumour, with clear margins, followed by radiation therapy to the remaining breast tissue on the same side.

Wasike said BCT treatment is usually done in two ways: lumpectomy, which focuses on the removal of the tumour and a small amount of surrounding breast tissue, and quadrantectomy, which removes the tumour and about

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a quarter of the breast tissue on that side.

Breast cancer is among the common cancer cases



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in Uganda, affecting 28 per 100,000 women. Others are cancer of the cervix, cancer of the prostate and kaposi's sarcoma.

Dr Henry Ddungu, the joint conference chairperson and a consultant haematologist at UCI, said the conference shall provide a forum for the stakeholders to contribute to policy debates and issues leading to better management and treatment of cancer in Uganda and beyond.

"We all know how dangerous cancer is. It is also no longer news that the disease is growing very fast in Uganda. On that note, we need to put our heads together and forge a way forward. We, therefore, hope to achieve a lot during this conference," Ddungu said.

Women have been encouraged to go for early breast cancer screening, which will allow them to conserve

their breasts. When Uganda's radiotherapy machine broke down in April last year, creating a crisis, the Aga Khan University Hospital offered to work with the Ugandan Government, to provide 400 'badly off' cancer patients with free treatment as a short term intervention.

Wasike, however, revealed that plans are underway to construct a new the Aga Khan University Hospital in Kampala. The teaching hospital, he said will not only have international standards, but also help develop the professional human resources needed to raise the quality of healthcare across public and private sectors.