Hundreds get cancer treatment at Mulago

By Violet Nabatanzi

At least 800 patients with different types of cancers have undergone radiotherapy treatment at Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) in Mulago.

The 800 patients, both children and adults, have been treated ever since the installation of the radiotherapy cancer machine in December last year.

"The number of patients is steadily increasing and at the moment, we are capable of treating about 80 patients per day," the director of the institute, Dr Jackson Orem, said.

"According to the international standards of radiotherapy treatment, one radiotherapy machine has to serve a population of 26,000 people. For Uganda, with a population of approximately 40 million people, it means that if we are to use the formula of one million people for one machine, we need 40 machines," he said.

The new machine takes a minimum of 45 seconds to treat a cancer patient, depending on the type of cancer they have.

Radiotherapy is a treatment involving the use of high energy radiation to treat cancer. Almost half of all people with cancer have radiotherapy as part of their treatment plan.

Regional centre

UCI offers specialised services in areas of cancer treatment, research and prevention. It was recently upgraded to be an East African treatment reference centre treating patients from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

After the breakdown of the old radiotherapy machine in 2016, arrangements were made between the Government and Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi to treat 400 cancer patients.

The old machine, which used to treat 75% of cancer patients, was donated to UCI in 1995.

Almost half of all patients with cancer have radiotherapy as part of their treatment.



Dr Jackson Orem standing next to the new radiotherapy machine recently. Photo by Mary Kansiime

Uganda registers 320 new cancer cases in every 100,000 patients today compared to 10 years ago when it only registered 120 new cases per 100,000.

During the launch of the new radiotherapy machine recently, Dr Awusi Kavuma, a senior medical physicist, said the new machine was highly sophisticated, computerised and is extremely adjustable in locating and treating specific cancer tumours.

The machine costs Euros 664,830 (about sh2.9b). Part of the money was a contribution from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Uganda Cancer Institute boss Dr Jackson Orem said with a population of 40 million people, Uganda needs 40 machines to meet the internationally recommended ratio of radiotherapy machines to the population.



40 MORE MACHINES



A patient waiting to get radiotherapy treatment at Mulago recently. AFP photo



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