LIONS CLUB GLOBAL LAUDS UGANDA'S CHILD CANCER CARE

By Lawrence Mulondo

A bright, colourful play area has been unveiled at Mulago National Referral Hospital, redefining how childhood cancer is treated in Uganda, with Lions Club International leaders and local specialists hailing it as a critical step toward healing not just the body, but the mind.

The facility, established within the hospital's oncology department, was officially inaugurated yesterday. It was developed through a partnership between Lions Clubs International, the Global HOPE Programme and Mulago Hospital, with support from Lions past international director Aruna Abhey Oswal.

The play area is designed to provide a safe and child-friendly space where young cancer patients can play and momentarily escape the demanding aspects of cancer treatment.

PLAY IS IMPORTANT THERAPY

Speaking during the launch, paediatric haemato-oncologist Dr Jennifer Zungu emphasised that play is not a luxury, but an essential part of therapy for children battling cancer.

She explained that hospitalisation often isolates children from school, family and friends, creating emotional distress that can slow recovery.

"There is strong evidence that play therapy is a powerful psychosocial intervention," Zungu said. "Through activities such as drawing, storytelling, puzzles, and creative expression, children reduce anxiety, improve their mood and cope better with treatment."

According to her, the newly established space has been carefully designed with therapeutic toys and interactive features to encourage emotional expression and social interaction among patients.

"When a child plays, they momentarily step away from being patients and return to being children," she said, adding that laughter and creativity can be as important as medicine in the healing process.

Experts at the event highlighted that children diagnosed with cancer face extraordinary emotional and physical challenges, including prolonged isolation and anxiety brought on by intensive medical procedures.

Prof. Murali Krishna, a surgical oncologist, noted that a cancer diagnosis often robs children of their childhood for months or even years.

"Treatment alone is not enough. We must also care for their mental well-being," he said, pointing out that hospital environments can be intimidating for children.

PHOTO BY LAWRENCE MU...



Officials watching children diagnosed with cancer play in the Aruna Abhey Oswal Children's playgrou... at the Oncology department of Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala, yesterday

BACKGROUND

Lions Club District 411B Uganda currently comprises 67 clubs with more than 2,700 members. Leaders say efforts are underway to expand membership and establish a second district to enhance service delivery nationwide.

STAKEHOLDER REMARKS

For Oswal, whose contribution made the project possible, the initiative is deeply personal.

"As a parent, seeing a child smile means everything," she said. "If we can bring joy or even save one life, then we have done something meaningful."

She urged stakeholders to safeguard the facility and called for expanded partnerships to replicate similar projects across the country, stressing that collaboration is key to serving humanity effectively.

Second vice-president of Lions International Dr Manoj Shah praised the medical teams at Mulago for their dedication and compassion, describing their work as exceptional.

"As the world advances, this is becoming one of the most critical areas in hospital treatment," Shah said, adding that reducing stress among young patients ultimately makes clinical care more effective.

District 411B Governor Allen Tush Naturinda commended Oswal for her vision, noting that such ideas require empathy and a deep understanding of children's needs.

Mulago Hospital executive director Dr Rosemary Byanyima said the partnership on the project has evolved from training medical personnel to transforming patient care more broadly.

She acknowledged that medicine alone is not sufficient, and that holistic approaches are necessary.

The hospital committed to maintaining the play centre and equipping it with educational content to further support patients during their stay.

The visiting delegation also toured the Lions Sustainable Nutrition Project at Mwanamugimu Ward within the hospital complex, which focuses on improving nutrition an... vulnerable children.

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