

5<sup>th</sup> FEB. 2024

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Kampala-Uganda

Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate the February world cancer month. The commemoration in Uganda is being led by Uganda Cancer Institute in collaboration with civil society organisations under the Uganda Cancer Society umbrella. The theme for this year is Close the Care Gap. This theme compels stakeholders to do more to expand care and treatment as well as join hands to strengthen ongoing interventions, among others. During this Month, two important days are commemorated. **The World Cancer Day held every 4 February and the International Childhood Cancer Day held every 15<sup>th</sup> February. These are very important days for us to take stock of what has been achieved, look at the existing gaps as well as commit to do more.**

By raising worldwide **awareness**, improving **education** and catalysing personal, collective and government **action**, we are all working together to reimagine a world where millions of preventable cancer deaths are saved and access to life-saving cancer treatment and care is equitable for all - no matter who you are or where you live.

### **Current Status of Cancer in Uganda**

The Burden of Cancer is increasing globally, and it is estimated that 56% of all new cancer cases and 70% of all cancer related mortality is in LMICs. It is estimated that Uganda has 34,005 new cases of cancer every year (GLOBOCAN 2020). Of these, an estimated 20% (7400 in 2021) of new cancer cases make it to the Uganda Cancer Institute for care. Over 27,000 Ugandans do not access cancer care services. The government of Uganda through the Uganda Cancer Institute is making investments to expand access to world class cancer care.

At the Uganda Cancer Institute – Mulago Campus, the government has embarked on expansion of in-patient infrastructure that will see bed capacity of the UCI increased to 350 beds. In addition, a number of key machines and equipment have been purchased such as 3 high end Linear accelerators to support radiotherapy, a Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography (SPECT) Scan as part of the upcoming nuclear medicine facility. The Institute

has expanded diagnostic facilities through modernization of the laboratory and the oncology imaging divisions which boast of highly qualified personnel and high-end equipment.

With support of the African Development Bank, the UCI is also establishing a multipurpose research and training facility that will house a number of facilities including a 3T MRI, bone marrow transplant facilities, clinics and other patient care, training and research facilities.

In addition, the government of Uganda has embarked on decentralization of cancer care in Uganda with creation of regional cancer centers in Arua, Gulu Mbale and Mbarara. The goal of these centres is to improve access to cancer care services from the current 20% to 85% by 2025/26. The Northern Uganda Regional Cancer Center started operations and is yet to fully operationalize. The other three centres are operating at small capacity but expected to expand in the near future.

The Government of Uganda through the Uganda Cancer Institute is striving to make world class cancer care available to every Uganda where they live. We are running free cancer awareness screening clinics for to ensure early detection and early treatment under the Community Cancer Services.

All this is done to ensure that any gaps in cancer care closed and survival is improved.

### **Civil Society Support to Cancer Care**

The Uganda Cancer Society has been actively addressing the care gap for cancer patients through a series of impactful initiatives. As a coordination umbrella of more than 45 civil society organisations, we are placing a significant emphasis on raising awareness about cancer prevention, early detection, and demystifying myths and misconceptions. We have conducted extensive awareness campaigns reaching diverse communities across the nation, ensuring that vital information reaches those who need it most. In addition to awareness efforts, we have implemented community outreach programs to serve underserved populations, providing crucial screening services and facilitating access to healthcare facilities. Recognizing the multifaceted needs of cancer patients and their families, the Uganda Cancer Society offers a range of support services. These include counseling, providing free accommodation, meals and transport to patients who need them, especially those from upcountry, and palliative care, among others.

UCS also through its membership supports research to inform interventions in the country. This is because data generation aids planning in the country. Research has not only informed planning but also advocacy. Our advocacy efforts seek to drive policy changes that improve cancer care, including increased government funding for treatment facilities and enhanced access to essential medications. Through collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners, we aim to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and build the capacity of healthcare professionals in cancer diagnosis, treatment, and palliative care.

As an organization committed to advancing cancer care in Uganda, we remain dedicated to closing the care gap and improving outcomes for all individuals affected by cancer. Through continued collaboration and concerted efforts, we strive to make meaningful progress in the fight against cancer and ensure that every patient receives the care and support they deserve.

We thank the Government of Uganda through the Uganda Cancer Institute and the Ministry of Health for the warm climate of cooperation and collaboration that has been extended to civil society organisations under Uganda Cancer Society! We can't thank you enough! As partners, we pledge to continue engaging with government in the spirit of ensuring meaningful interventions in the country, which we believe will go a long way in terms attaining the ministry of health's goal of a healthy and productive population.

### **About the Uganda Cancer Institute**

Uganda Cancer Institute is a leading government entity dedicated to advancing cancer care and promoting excellence in patient care. We strive to foster collaborations, share knowledge, and drive innovation to shape the future of cancer care in Uganda and beyond. The Uganda Cancer Institute currently comprises five campuses, the Uganda Cancer Institute – Mulago Campus, which is the East African Regional Centre of Excellence in Cancer Care, Research and Training; The UCI Northern Uganda Regional Cancer Centre (GULU), The UCI Western Uganda Regional Cancer Centre (Mbarara), The UCI Eastern Uganda Regional Cancer Centre (Mbale) and The UCI West-Nile Uganda Regional Cancer Centre (Arua). All these centres work collaborative to provide access to cancer care services for Ugandans.

### **About Uganda Cancer Society**

Uganda Cancer Society (UCS) is an umbrella of more than 45 Civil Society Organizations [CSOs] that plays a key part within the cancer control continuum, ranging from service delivery, raising awareness, advocacy with policymakers, patient empowerment, monitoring progress and accountability, capacity building, palliative care and engaging in research. UCS's growing mandate since its founding in 2011, seeks to hold policymakers accountable and shape health services to better respond to people's needs, particularly for underserved and hard-to-reach populations, ultimately contributing to improving cancer control services.

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