

# Health experts seek routine cancer screening

BY SYLVIA KATUSHABE

**KAMPALA.** Health experts have renewed calls for the integration of routine cancer screening and psychosocial support into all health services, warning that several people are succumbing to cancer due to late diagnosis.

The appeal follows the recent death of Sharifa Nabakooza, a mother of two, whose succumbed to breast cancer. Her friends and medical professionals now demand a fundamental shift in cancer care—one that prioritises early detection and mental health support at every point of contact with the health system.

Out of that grief emerged Beauty of Ashes, a humanitarian initiative led by Dr Mary Mwesigwa, a medical doctor based in the United States, dedicat-

ed to promoting cancer awareness, early screening, and supporting affected individuals.

"Cancer is curable if diagnosed early. Screening should be part of routine healthcare," Dr Mwesigwa said during a cancer awareness launch in Kampala last Friday. "No one should walk into a health facility and leave without at least being assessed for common cancer risks."

She said every interaction with the health system should be used to screen for cancer such as antenatal visits, treatment for other illnesses and school programmes.

Reflecting on Nabakooza's death, Dr Mwesigwa said earlier screening could have changed the outcome. "Her story could have ended differently," she added.

Statistics from the Uganda Cancer


Institute (UCI) paint a grim picture. Uganda records about 34,008 new cancer cases annually, with more than 22,000 deaths. Over 75 percent of cases are diagnosed at advanced stages, significantly reducing survival chances.

The commonest cancers include prostate, cervical, breast, throat, Kaposi sarcoma, and liver cancer.

Dr Racheal Kansime Kanyangabo, a psycho-oncologist at Mulago National Referral Hospital and founding president of the Uganda Psycho-Oncology Society, said beyond diagnosis and treatment, there is a need to address the psychological toll of cancer.

"Many patients experience depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder," Dr Kansime said, adding that caregivers also get affected.

Experts say sustained government commitment will be crucial to turning early detection into standard practice and saving thousands of lives each year.



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