Bone marrow transplant services at The Nairobi West Hospital a game changer in Kenya

With tremendous developments in medical technology and a growing number of specialised medical practitioners, Kenya has in recent years emerged as a favourite medical destination in East Africa.

Many patients from other countries in the region are now opting to come into the country for medical treatments they would previously seek abroad. It is not only cheaper here, but also closer to home.

These patients come from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Others even come from as far as Zambia, Malawi, and Congo. The medical services they seek in the country include open-heart surgery, cancer treatment, kidney transplants, and now the recently launched bone marrow transplant services at The Nairobi West Hospital – a first in the country.

This status propels the country to invest heavily in its health sector so that it can attract more patients from across the continent.

It is estimated that Africans spend about Ksh380 billion annually in search of healthcare services, such as bone marrow transplants, overseas. With The Nairobi West Hospital now offering the same, it is an important milestone for many who would need the procedure in Kenya.

Bone marrow transplant (BMT), also known as a stem cell transplant, is a medical treatment that replaces one's bone marrow with healthy cells. The replacement cells can either come from your own body or a donor, and can be used to treat certain types of cancers, such as leukaemia, myeloma, lymphoma, and other blood and immune system diseases that affect the bone marrow.

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Prof Andrew Kanyi Gachii, the Chief Medical Director at The Nairobi West Hospital, described the unit's first successful BMT procedure and the country's first, as a milestone in medical history.

Prof Gachii said: "We have successfully transplanted bone marrow to a patient who had multiple myeloma… The hospital aims to provide easy access to bone marrow transplants as a possible cure for patients with complex blood disorders."

The hospital's management said the unit would provide a broad range of services for patients whose bone marrow had been damaged or destroyed by disease, infection, or chemotherapy.

"The unit will also cater for the diagnosis and management of all kinds of blood disorders in adults and children, including cancers of the blood," the hospital said.

Dr Guarav Dixit, the head of the BMT unit, notes that in some instances, BMT offers the only hope of a cure in treating blood cancers, such as acute myeloid leukaemia and acute lymphocytic leukaemia.

The Nairobi West Hospital was founded in the 1980s with the foundation of humanity first, and has been offering genuine services to the public.

"We have thrived with the community through Kenya's best and darkest days. Our first clients have witnessed the hospital grow and develop into an accessible service centre. The Nairobi West Hospital not only serves those in Kenya, as we often have international patients coming to seek treatment at the facility," says Prof Gachii.

The hospital has been moving to make the facility a one-stop centre for medical services. In 2021, it launched a first of a kind medical evacuation programme, with the advancement coming at a time when the entire globe was working on strengthening emergency medical responses.

The hospital targets the growing demand for air evacuations in Kenya and East Africa, which will be made possible by the launch of a customised helipad at the top of its new 17-story building in Nairobi.

Speaking during the launch of the BMT unit, the hospital's chief medical officer, Dr Andrew Gachie, said that the milestone would help save the lives of many Kenyans by speeding their access to specialised medical care.

The helipad, placed on the hospital's 12th floor, is a first of its kind, as other hospitals have their helipads on the ground.

"The helipad can accommodate air ambulances from anywhere in the country and outside, and right here at Nairobi West, where we have a 54-bed ICU facility just two floors below the helipad, enabling the patient to receive immediate attention," Prof Gachii adds.

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the facility was well equipped to fight the disease, and was credited for saving many lives in East Africa.

The Nairobi West Hospital is also credited for treating cancer diseases. In 2019, it was the first facility in the country and in West, Central, and East Africa, to begin treating cancer patients using the Halcyon radiotherapy system.

The Halcyon system simplifies and enhances virtually every aspect of image-guided volumetric intensity-modulated radiotherapy (IMRT), including improved patient comfort and shortening the time from installation to first treatment without sacrificing quality.

The system is well suited to treat a majority of cancer patients, offering advanced treatments for lung, prostate, breast, head and neck, and many other forms of cancer.

THE NAIROBI WEST
HOSPITAL

FIRST EVER BONE MARROW TRANSPLANT