

The call to battle cancer in South Sudan

As South Sudan grapples with conflict, political instability and continuing poor health infrastructures among myriads of other problems, a growing number of cancer cases is causing alarm in the medical community.

All the risk factors for cancer are rampant in South Sudan: tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, obesity and household solid fuel use. The leading cancers being diagnosed include cancer of the cervix, breast, prostate and oesophagus, leukaemia and lymphomas. With no cancer registry in the country, the exact incidence and prevalence of the different cancers will not be known for some time.

Because there are only two pathologists in the country and a lack of diagnostic facilities and equipment in the public hospitals, the burden falls on the private sector.

Cancer treatment is still nascent to non-existent in South Sudan. Basic surgical removal of cancer growths is the only option for many people. The country does not possess an oncology facility and consequently, with no access to chemotherapy and radiotherapy, treatment is a major challenge. Those who can afford it are referred for further management to countries such as the Sudan, Egypt, Uganda, India or South Africa.

For those who cannot afford treatment abroad, it is the end of the road. They say, "Thanks doctor for the diagnosis, I will go back home and wait till the hour comes". I am always in agony after hearing that.

THE COUNTRY URGENTLY NEEDS A NATIONAL CANCER POLICY, AND A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF CANCER.

South Sudan and the Ministry of Health should embark on a concerted effort to raise awareness of cancer. The country urgently needs a national cancer policy, and a strategic plan for the prevention and control of cancer. More pathologists should be trained and oncology services should be established. A commitment to allocate resources to fight the increasing scourge must be supported, and donors and partners must push for such initiatives. If the issues are not addressed, we may lose the war to cancer before a single battle is fought.

The battle must start NOW.



Recurrent left breast mucinous adenocarcinoma in a 36 years old woman in Juba, South Sudan.
(Credit: Dr Oromo Francis Seriano)

Dr Oromo Francis Seriano Omojo

MBBS, MD (Pathology)

Assistant Professor of Pathology,

Head Department of Pathology and
Forensic Medicine

College of Medicine, University of Juba

Email: otimoi72@yahoo.co.uk