

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE IN KENYA

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Nuclear medicine is a branch of medicine that utilises the tracer principle. It uses radiopharmaceuticals to evaluate molecular, metabolic, physiological and pathological conditions of the body for diagnosis, treatment and research purpose. Nuclear medicine has clinical applications in almost all body systems, for example, oncologic, gastrointestinal, renal, cardiac, skeletal and endocrine systems. In Kenya, nuclear medicine is mostly practised in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Currently, Kenya has a population of about 50.76 million. Every year around 41,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed, with 28,500 related deaths. 80% of cancer cases are always diagnosed at late stages or at incurable stages. This is largely attributed to the limitations of nuclear medicine in the country. Kenya is currently facing a number challenges in the successful practise and application of nuclear medicine. Kenya has only two nuclear medicine facilities namely; Kenyatta National Hospital and Aga Khan University Hospital with limited nuclear medicine personnel. In addition, nuclear medicine is relatively a new medical field in the country and very few people are aware of it. There is also local unavailability of radioisotope and kits, since Kenya doesn't manufacture radiopharmaceuticals and the kits required instead they are imported from developed nations e.g. USA and South Africa. Kenya also experiences unstable power supply, which has an adverse effect on equipment, leading to frequent machine breakdown and shortened lifespan. Furthermore, there are not more than ten nuclear medicine physicians, medical physicists, nuclear medicine technologists, radiologists, and radio pharmacists in the country. This is caused by lack of local training and research in the field of nuclear medicine. Radiation safety and waste management is another daunting task in the nuclear medicine therapy. Above all, the cost of accessing nuclear medicine services is expensive thus causing patients not to seek for the services.

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