

# JCRC appeals for Shs 14bn to establish bone marrow transplant unit

**GEOFFREY SERUGO**

The Joint Clinical Research Centre (JCRC) is seeking Shs 14.3 billion to establish a fully operational bone marrow transplant (BMT) unit in Kampala. The appeal was made by JCRC's Executive Director during a fundraising event launched over the weekend by Rotary International President, Francesco Arezzo, in Lubowa, a Kampala suburb.

The BMT center was initially launched by President Museveni in 2023. However, delays in accessing funding have slowed progress. JCRC has made some headway by setting up temporary infrastructure, but the current facility cannot meet the growing demand for bone marrow transplants.

The proposed unit is expected to serve patients with a wide range of conditions requiring bone marrow transplants, including sickle cell anemia, blood cancers, and other bone marrow disorders. It will also provide specialized services such as plasma exchange for children.

Statistics indicate that 1% of Uganda's population suffers from sickle cell disease, with approximately 20,000 babies born each year with the condition.

"This is the first bone marrow transplant centre in Uganda, and probably the first in Africa. Currently, patients cannot be treated locally and must be sent to India and other countries. I am happy to see the community contributing to equip it," said Rotary

International President, Francesco Arezzo.

He added, "The centre is a necessity, and we must mobilize resources to save lives not only in Uganda but across the region as well."

The initial funding request from JCRC was approximately \$20 million, to be released in phases. The first phase requires \$4 million, while total funding needed within one year ranges between \$17-20 million to fully operationalize the transplant unit.

Monica Musenero, the minister for Science, Technology, and Innovation the initiative is just a gate opener.

"It will create opportunities for Ugandans to access cell-based medicine, individualized treatments, and gene therapy," Musenero said.

Dr Cissy Kityo Mutuluúza, JCRC executive

director, highlighted the potential of bone marrow transplant to cure numerous diseases, including blood cancers, sickle cell disease, bone marrow disorders, and even HIV.

Pearl Bank led the fundraising campaign by contributing Shs 200 million. Pearl Bank Managing Director, Julius Kakeeto said the partnership is not merely philanthropic but a strategic investment aligned with Uganda's national development framework, particularly the ATMS Strategy (Agro-Industrialization, Tourism, Minerals, and Science & Technology Innovation). "Our support for the centre strengthens this pillar by advancing medical research, expanding specialized healthcare infrastructure and building local capacity in complex medical procedures," Kakeeto said.