

Heart and spinal injuries patients get free surgery

Written by BY JOHN MUCHANGI
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Some 31 patients with heart and spinal problems will benefit from free surgeries at Kenyatta National Hospital this week. The 15 with heart ailments include a six-month-old baby who was successfully operated on yesterday. KNH said one open heart surgery costs about Sh300,000 but the patients fee will be highly subsidised.

The project is being facilitated by the Medical and Educational Aid to Kenya team from Britain. “The successful partnership between KNH and MEAK has enhanced surgeons’ skills, improved equipment and technology,” the hospital said in statement. Sixteen other patients with spinal cord deformities are also undergoing surgeries until Thursday.

Head of the spinal injuries project Dr Bwana Ombacho said the patients will receive free surgery and only pay the normal hospitalisation fee. “Many patients waiting for orthopaedic care have waited too long in the past and the project will help to address this,” said Dr Ombacho. The surgeries are being carried out by KNH surgeons in partnership with US-based NuVasive Spine Foundation.

Nuvasive ambassador Pitchou Malaba, a Kenyan living in the US, said they will spend about Sh2 million for each operation. “We will have two more such projects in September and December this year,” said Malaba. In February the foundation organised a similar project at KNH where 15 patients with spinal injuries underwent corrective surgery.

According to the Ministry of Medical Services, 65 per cent of all spinal injuries in Kenya are as a result of road accidents. Dr Ombacho said patients being attended to have spinal deformities, degenerative, traumatic and infective spine conditions. Others have neo-plastic spine ailments. “The project will also provide exchange of knowledge, training and research,” he said.

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The demand for spine surgery has grown steadily over the years and treatments have become more complex and expensive. KNH said the 16 patients benefitting from this programme have been waiting for orthopedic care in the hospital. The National Spinal Injury Hospital in Nairobi is the only specialised facility for these surgeries in East and Central Africa.

Of all the patients the facility receives, falling from height contributes to 25 per cent, while injuries caused by assaults are blamed for another 10 per cent. Spinal injuries affect all the ages within the society, but they are common among adolescents and young adults, making it a concern for the government.