



The SAGE Encyclopedia of Cancer and Society

Zambia

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The Republic of Zambia is a landlocked country in southern Africa that is surrounded by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the north; Tanzania to the northeast; Malawi to the east; Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia to the south; and Angola to the west. It is part of what is known as sub-Saharan Africa. Zambia became a British colony known as Northern Rhodesia in 1911, and in 1953 it became part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland until 1963. The country gained its independence in 1964 as Zambia. Zambia's population, as of July 2014, is estimated at 14.6 million, with a life expectancy at birth of 51.8 years. For every 100,000 citizens, there are 10 doctors, 80 nurses, and 30 community health workers.

As with most African countries, access to quality or adequate health care was reserved for Europeans during the time of colonization and occupation, with few indigenous people having access to medicine and quality health care. Folk remedies and herbal cures still compete with modern medicine, particularly in remote regions of Zambia, to treat all manner of illness. This includes cancer.

Zambia has some of the highest rates of cancer in Africa, and cancer incidence is on the rise. Estimates suggest there are more than 7,000 new cases a year, the most common being cervical cancer. Zambia has one of the highest cervical cancer rates in the world, with 90 out of every 100,000 women contracting cervical cancer. The World Health Organization ranks Zambia as having the third highest mortality rate from cervical cancer, a preventable disease.

Cervical cancer in Zambia is closely linked to the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and the humanpapilloma virus (HPV). It has been reported that women infected with HIV are thought to be three to five times more likely to develop cervical lesions that can become cancerous. The increased attention of the incidence of cervical cancer among Zambian women has brought awareness to the causal link between cervical cancer, HPV, and male circumcision. Some are skeptical that this can be a contributing factor to cervical cancer's being more common in Zambian women than in women from other countries, while others consider this a significant factor, as the vast majority of Zambian men are not circumcised. The Center for Infectious Disease Research is home to one of the largest cervical cancer screening initiatives in the world as well as to Zambia's HPV vaccination campaign, which began in 2013 to reduce incidence of cervical cancer, including public education and outreach.

A growing cancer burden in Zambia is the increasing rate of childhood cancers. Lymphomas have been the most reported, followed by retinoblastoma, kaposi, and sarcomas. Many cancers are presented and diagnosed at an advanced stage while others are left undetected, adding to the poor survival rates and high mortality. With early detection, children diagnosed with cancer have a 70 to 85 percent chance of being cured.

The Kayula Childhood Cancer Foundation was established in March 2012. It is a Non-Governmental Organization established in memory of Kayula Zina Sata who passed away in 2009 at the age of 4 from neuroblastoma, a rare form of cancer. The foundation was created to support the University Teaching Hospital's Pediatric Cancer Ward. The University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka is the only hospital in the country that has a pediatric oncology department. Patients come from all ten provinces of Zambia to seek treatment, sometimes spending more than a year. One of the main contributions of the foundation is the Parent House, where parents stay while their children undergo treatment. Children who are well enough are able to stay at the Parent House in between their chemotherapy and other treatments. This is beneficial to the family and helps the parents feel at home and also give

the children a “home away from home” feeling, as a majority of the patients come from far beyond Lusaka. The Cancer Diseases Hospital (CDH) also treats some children’s cancer cases but only on an outpatient basis.

Organizations and Institutions

The National Council for Scientific Research in Lusaka and the School of Medicine at the University of Zambia coordinate cancer research in Zambia. The Zambia Cancer Foundation, operating from the University Teaching Hospital in Lusaka, is involved in raising money for cancer treatment and caring for patients and their families. The University Teaching Hospital is the biggest hospital in Zambia.

In July 2007, the CDH opened in Zambia. The CDH marked a milestone in cancer treatment, as it was the first of its kind in Zambia and was designed to house facilities to treat patients who previously had to travel great distances to South Africa for cancer treatment. The hospital houses five scanners, the largest of which is a linear accelerator. The rooms where the majority of scanners are kept were constructed with reinforced concrete walls up to 700 mm thick. The walls of the room that house the linear accelerator range from 1,200 mm to 2,500 mm. Thicker walls contain radiation more effectively. However, thicker walls produce more heat, increasing the tendency for walls to crack and allow radiation to escape. The health risks for the hospital staff and the general public are great. As such, the International Atomic Energy Agency frequently visited the site to monitor the design and construction of the rooms.

The International Atomic Energy Agency supports cancer care and treatment through a variety of initiatives and partnerships. The Technical Cooperation Program is the key mechanism for planning and delivery of radiotherapy assistance to Africa and other regions. The Program of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) is a broad-based global partnership that aims to help developing countries build a comprehensive, sustainable cancer control program.

Other organizations provide support to cancer patients and their families. The Zambian Cancer Society (ZCS), founded in 2007, seeks to provide access to and disseminate information on cancer, offer psychosocial support to cancer patients and their families, and increase awareness of the programs, products, and services provided by the ZCS and other resources. The Zambian Childhood Cancer Foundation was established to provide holistic care for children with cancer and life-threatening blood disorders (such as hemophilia and sickle cell disease) and also provide assistance to their families through practical and psychosocial support programs.

Many countries in the developing world are facing a cancer crisis; with few resources to fight the increasing cancer burden, many individuals and organizations work together to fill a variety of needs.

See Also: [AIDS-Related Cancers](#); [HPV Vaccination](#); [South Africa](#); [Zimbabwe](#).

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Further Readings

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