

## ***Improving the quality of cancer treatment in Zambia***

### ***The challenge...***

Zambia has some of the highest incidents of cancer in Africa. The country's cancer indicators are negatively affected by the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and three out of the top five cancers are HIV related. As a result, most cancer patients are aged between 25 and 45, much younger than those in developed countries. For many years, the Government of Zambia has made cancer its priority and the official opening in July 2007 of the country's first Cancer Disease Hospital (CDH) was a significant milestone in fighting cancer.

### ***The project...***

The establishment of the CDH by the Government of Zambia was supported by the IAEA and the OPEC Fund for International Development. The CDH is equipped with state of the art equipment, including a cobalt-60 machine, a linear accelerator, a high dose rate brachytherapy unit, mould room, workshop and dosimetry equipment, a simulator and a treatment planning system for both brachytherapy and external beam therapy.

Following the establishment of the hospital, the IAEA continued to support the CDH through a technical cooperation project to train key staff such as radiation oncologists, medical physicists and radiotherapy technicians. The training upgraded radiotherapy skills in dosimetry, treatment planning and the physical and radiation protection aspects of modern radiotherapy techniques. Guidance and expertise were also provided for the commissioning of the Theraplan Plus treatment planning system and the development and validation of a curriculum for the local training of radiation therapy technologists (RTTs). Recommendations were made on establishing a national school for RTT education, providing mentorship for teaching staff and implementing an RTT programme.

### ***The impact...***

The CDH opened in 2007 and a year later the number of patients treated had reached more than 1200. As a result of the training provided through the most recent technical cooperation project, the quality of the services has improved and the number of patients treated has increased.

The CDH is now moving towards the implementation of a Zambian qualification for RTTs. Having a local programme in place will offer a solution to satisfy immediate needs, provide a sustainable workforce for the future and allow the vision of expanding radiation therapy in the country to be realized, to the benefit of cancer patients in Zambia.

The hospital has set up an 'information desk' to disseminate cancer information and a cancer survivors group meets each month. The medical staff believe in managing cancer patients using a multidisciplinary approach and applying evidence based guidelines.



*The CDH in Lusaka, Zambia.*