

Africa faces cancer epidemic

May 11 2007

Africa faces an epidemic of cancer, health ministers were told at a conference in London.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer predicts 16 million new cases of cancer will be diagnosed around the world each year by 2020, up from 11 million in 2000. The agency said 70 percent of those cases will be in poorer countries, the BBC reported.

Alan Milburn, a former British health minister who is leading the conference, told the BBC in an interview that thousands of people in Africa die every day suffering from pain that could be relieved with a few painkillers.

"The basic infrastructure and resources to cope with the new health epidemic is basically not there and we have to do something about it," Milburn said. "We know that there is a steam train that is coming down the track and we have a choice -- we can wither, build some new track or we can wait for the train to hit us."

In some African countries, cancer cases are increasing because people are living longer. In some others, the HIV epidemic that has brought life expectancy down has caused a higher rate of cancer in people with weak immune systems.

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