

Ray of light in cancer care

A Japanese cancer specialist on Wednesday, 22 May 2013, said she has started the world's first clinical trial of a powerful, non-surgical, short-term radiation therapy for breast cancer.



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The National Institute of Radiological Sciences has begun the trial using "heavy ion radiotherapy" which emits a pinpoint beam that can be accurately directed at malignant cells, said Kumiko Karasawa, radiation oncologist and breast cancer specialist.

The study was launched amid renewed global interest in breast cancer and its treatment after Oscar-winning actress Angelina Jolie revealed she had undergone a preventative double mastectomy.

Heavy ion radiotherapy has proved effective in combating other forms of cancer that have not spread, Karasawa said.

"We are able to conduct this trial because we have greater understanding of what types of breast cancer can benefit from this pinpoint treatment," Karasawa said.

Japan is home to three of the world's six medical centres that have the gigantic 97.2million (R920-million) facilities.

The therapy has proved its worth on other forms of cancer, including prostate and lung, Kyodo News said, but has never before been used on breast cancer.

Conventional radiotherapy uses X-rays and gamma rays that are most potent at the surface of the body, but weaken as they travel deeper into the tissue.

In the trial, Karasawa will treat 20 patients aged at least 60 with small tumours that have not spread. The patients will go through an hour of therapy a day for four days, much shorter than conventional radiation therapy that may last for months.

The trial will follow the patients for five years to assess the outcome, Karasawa said.

Japan has a good track record with breast cancer, giving patients a 90% five-year survival rate.

Localised and less invasive medical treatments are increasingly important as ageing Japan tries to reduce the physical burden for patients, the national institute said.

Source: Sapa-AFP, The Times

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