

Breaking Barriers: Brain surgery now possible for residents of Makueni County

Patients in Makueni County no longer need to travel to Nairobi for specialized



Figure 1A neurosurgical team performs the first-ever brain tumour surgery at Makueni County Referral Hospital, marking a major milestone in bringing specialized neurosurgical care closer to residents

neurosurgical care anymore. What was once an inaccessible service is now closer to home, saving lives, reducing costs and restoring hope for patients and their families. This was after functional neurosurgical services were established at the Makueni County Referral Hospital under the leadership of consultant neurosurgeon, Dr Mativo Muthoka.

The journey started with a neurosurgery outreach camp in 2024. There was a huge demand. Patients with head injuries, spinal problems, congenital malformations and other neurological disorders came not only from Makueni but also from neighbouring Counties. The scale of need meant that neurosurgical care could no longer be a one-off intervention. The outreach also helped identify patients who have lived with neurological conditions for years without access to specialist assessment and treatment, further highlighting the need to bring these services closer to the community.

Perception of brain surgery in the community and some health care workers was one of the major hurdles to the establishment of neurosurgical services in Makueni County. Many linked surgery with serious complications which could lead to death. Neurosurgery seemed even worst to fathom. Acceptance of the service was hard. Trust and confidence in the new services were built gradually through persistent patient engagement, awareness building and successful surgical outcomes.

In response, the County Government recruited a full-time neurosurgeon in 2024 and invested in building local capacity. The service is supported by a wider clinical team involved in patient assessment, diagnosis, surgery and post-operative care, reinforcing the importance of multi-disciplinary teamwork in delivering specialist care at County level. Today the hospital deals with complex cases such as brain tumours, spinal injuries and trauma injuries. The hospital reached a historic milestone in May 2025 when it performed its first ever brain tumour surgery, removing the tumour from a 69-year-old man which

took six hours. The tumour was located in the frontal lobe of the brain, the area that controls personality and movement. This was proof that complex neurosurgical treatment in the County is safe and effective.

Case Study: Ruth Musyoka's Road to Recovery

One of the most striking examples of the effect of these services is the story of Ruth Musyoka.

Earlier in 2025, Ruth began experiencing recurring headaches. Sometimes they were mild,

but they would often get worse and she would have to rely on painkillers to get relief. Over time, the pain worsened, becoming unbearable and



Figure 2 Ruth Musyoka tends to her poultry at her home in Makueni County after post recovery

accompanied by vomiting. On the 28th of April 2025, her condition suddenly deteriorated. She had gone to bed without any pain, only to wake up in the middle of the night severely ill. She was rushed to hospital, where Dr. Muthoka advised for a head CT scan. The results showed a brain tumour which was causing swelling and needed urgent surgery.

Like many patients, Ruth and her family were scared. The prospect of brain surgery was like a death sentence. She initially chose to return home in search of alternative treatment. However, through careful counselling, the consultants helped her and her husband understand the urgency of the situation and the possibility of a successful outcome.

On 1st June 2025 Ruth was finally admitted and had a successful 10-hour brain surgery on 4th June 2025. Now she is back home and has her quality of life back. She could barely perform simple chores, but now she is able to manage her entire household, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for her chickens.

Strong leadership has been a major factor in this success. The County Government under the leadership of H. E Mutula Kilonzo Jr. has been supportive, maintaining close contact with the hospital and investing in critical equipment and surgical consumables to sustain the service.

"I am grateful to the Governor," said Sammy Musyoka, Ruth's husband. "The hospital has always been there, but now it is more powerful than ever."



48 Governments 1 Nation



Makueni County Referral Hospital is today turning into a referral center for neurosurgical care in the region, thus reducing dependence on facilities like Kenyatta National Hospital.

What initiative has your County taken to establish and expand neurosurgical services locally, reducing the need for patients to travel to referral hospitals in Nairobi? We would love to hear your story.

Visit <https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/> to learn more about the successful initiatives on service delivery our Counties are undertaking.

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