Havana says U.S. embargo hurts Cuban cancer patients

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Cuba is facing difficulties getting medications and technology to treat children with cancer due to the U.S. economic embargo, state-run media said Thursday, citing an official with the pediatric service of the National Oncology and Radiobiology Institute.

The country's costs have been higher than they should have been because it cannot purchase medications or radioactive products in the United States and has to do so in third countries, Dr. Glenda Gomez said.

She also mentioned difficulties in obtaining equipment for anti-tumoral therapy, a situation that has forced Cuban doctors to "transfer patients from one province to another to receive treatment."

The Cuban health system currently has nine pediatric cancer treatment centers spread around the country.

The problems caused by the embargo for pediatric and cancer care are one of the most sensitive issues denounced by the Cuban government each year in its traditional report to the U.N. General Assembly regarding the consequences stemming from the U.S. sanctions.

Cuban authorities estimate that the country has lost more than $10 million in the oncological sector due to the blockade in recent years. Cancer is the No. 1 cause of death on the communist-ruled island.

The U.S. embargo put in place against the island in 1962 is one of the main issues of bilateral disagreement and, Havana says, it has caused economic damage to the Cuban economy calculated at more than $1 trillion.