

Short Communication**Don't Fright; Fight Cancer with Awareness**

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Cancer is a leading cause of death globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) appraisal states that cancer fatalities in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC's) exceed 70%. Furthermore, resources available for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer are limited or non-existent in LMIC's. So, awareness programs are the need in these countries. Also, the incidence of cancer is on the rise here; that is why it is important to step up cancer literacy and knowledge amongst the population.

It is to be emphasized that cancer is to a large extent is avoidable; many cancers can be prevented; others can be cured when detected early in their development and treated in time. Even with late-stage cancer, the pain can be reduced, the progression of cancer slowed down, and patients and their families helped to cope with the depressing situation.

Poor awareness towards cancer is a serious issue which not only affects public opinion and recognition of the disease but also delays the process of timely diagnosis and treatment of the patients (which is key for its control). Lack of awareness is the main hindrance for early detection-lowering the possibility of early diagnoses despite the availability of screening tests. One of the assessments revealed half of the people exhibiting readiness for favoring early detection if they were aware. Early detection is of immense significance in triumphant cancer stories. Here important to note is that despite progress (Including advances in molecular targeted therapy, immune therapy and gene therapy), cancer-related mortality is very high as most of the patients present at an advanced stage to the medical facility. It is a very regrettable statement of the WHO which declares that most cases of cancer are detected only in the advanced stages when they are untreatable. This is especially true in developing countries. Unfortunately, in developing country there is a lack of awareness among people about the various risk factors and preventive aspects of these common cancers, like early detection through screening and



treatment of precancerous lesions. Awareness of the public about warning signs of cancer about early detection and prevention is poor. Education on risk factors, early warning signals and their management are lacking.

The aim should be to create cancer awareness amongst the population about early detection by way of self-examination, regular general physical examination by a medical practitioner on need basis and so forth. It is also vital to follow a healthy lifestyle and sharing of survivor stories giving a message of hope and confidence. People should be provided knowledge regarding healthy lifestyles and healthy dietary habits to reduce the risk factors for the disease. There are myths about the causes of cancer and stigma about the disease. It is important to dispel the myths that people wrongly believe, inform them about the signs and symptoms, and the importance of screening for early detection. Hope is that it will lead to early detection which is important in the management and treatment of cancer and also prevention by making necessary lifestyle changes.

Delay in the detection of cancers is linked linearly with poor awareness. For some cancers like the oral cavity, uterine cervix and female breast, there are proven screening methods to catch the disease at an early stage when it is curable. However, cancer screening is not practiced in an organized fashion, even in developed countries; where do the developing nations stand! A small awareness is about few cancers only like oral, lung-like their presumed causative agents such as tobacco use, betel nut chewing, chronic trauma, etc. Our health education activities ought to act verily to publicize the other important factors like alcohol consumption, radiation, viral infections, genetics, obesity, etc. Regarding the awareness about early symptoms, very few are aware of them, like a lump, non-healing ulcer, nagging cough, persistent heartburn, etc.

The major thrust area of the cancer control program includes – public education and training facilities for human resource development. Population awareness of the cancer problem, seeing it as a priority and voicing achievable goals are all necessary elements of a successful cancer-control campaign. Cancer prevention involves efforts to reduce the risk of cancer- seen as a long-term investment aimed at getting a large population to adopt healthy habits. It can be very effective and impact a large portion of a population. Also, cancer prevention is general health promotion too. Cancer prevention activities coincidentally lower the risk of several other significant chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, joint degeneration and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Treatment is expensive, even resource-rich nations have difficulty providing adequate, high-quality treatment to all of their population in need.



Much of prevention is health education. Ideally, one could maximize cancer prevention in a population by ensuring that everyone understands the most effective elements of cancer control. The message must be appropriate, culturally sensitive and tailored to the audience. While the general health message may be engineered with the aid of outsiders, it must be refined by the members of the population who will use it and modified according to the local epidemiology and education level. Cancer awareness messaging should convey why a problem is important and ask for an action to address the problem. Therefore, whenever possible, the intervention should be based on descriptive epidemiology—that is, data specific to the population addressed. The first step is to perform a systematic assessment of cancer risk factors at the regional/country level. The objective of the assessment is to obtain good quality and comparable country-level epidemiological knowledge/ data. These data are needed to set priorities for the evidence-based allocation of scarce resources at hand. However, of the utmost importance is that our message should not exaggerate things or sensationalize the situation. It should not use fear-mongering to motivate the people for action. It is also desirable to make sure medical educational and religious/social leaders are aware and involved early on in an awareness effort. Healthcare providers must incorporate preventive activities and counseling in their medical practice too while treating or counseling for some other ailment or disease.

An important element of health promotion should be in the elementary school curriculum. People are more aware of cancer risk factors than cancer warning signs. There is a critical need to maintain the high awareness level of cancer risk factors, as having more public awareness will lead to less exposure to risk factors and better protection against the disease. Establishing partnerships with numerous media channels will enhance the spread of cancer information. The educational activities should focus on university undergraduates. Moreover, the education departments should emphasize integrating cancer prevention in the university curriculum for non-medical colleges.

Wherefore cancer is not an identity to be afraid of. It is curable now with multimodality treatment options of radiotherapy, surgery, chemotherapy, targeted therapy and hormonal therapy. Cancer is preventable; we may need to improve our lifestyle and diet. It is curable if detected early and treated properly. Awareness through mass media, print and audio-visual, may prove favorable in changing attitude or practice

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