

What needs to be done for Cancer in Pakistan?

Cancer in Pakistan is a major health problem. Various factors are causing an increasing cancer burden, growing and aging population, tobacco use and westernization a diet.

Like all unhappy things one does not bother about cancer, when we hear about a cancer patient, we shrug it off as we assume that it will never happen to us and is something that befalls only on others.

World over about thirty million people are affected by cancer. About nine million people are newly diagnosed each year. The dilemma is that 50% of these belong to the developing world where only 5% of the total world resources are available. The 5-year survival rate for all cancers combined is about 60%. Worldwide lung and breast cancer are the leading cause of cancer related morbidity among men and women respectively.

It's useful to know some facts about cancer. The person, who has never heard about oncology or cancer, think it to as a new disease and other who happens to have been in touch by some mean feels that cancer is on increase.

It is believed that the mankind has been fighting cancer since it was first identified in Hippocrates time, 400BC but it was not until 20th century that few cancer patients had hope for cure.

Due to ignorance, fear or shame many people do not seek medical advice but now with more awareness about cancer on the part of public, cancer more appropriately treated with better results.

Pakistan is an agro-based country. Until recent past 2% of the GNP was designated for health. Health insurance system neither exists nor is feasible in the country because of the level of education in this country. Like many other developing countries due to known reasons cancer is becoming a major health issue in this country as well. There is no

population based tumor registry in Pakistan, except in Karachi. Pakistan medical research council has established tumor registry in various parts of the country. Local cancer registry has been established in Lahore to determine the pattern of cancer in Punjab province of Pakistan.

Cancer is a group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells in the body. Cancer remains the second leading cause of death world over. Primarily cancer has two etiologies. External factors like chemicals, radiations exposure or viruses and endogenous ones like hormones, immune conditions or inherited genetic mutations could cause it. The risk of cancer increases with increasing age, with tobacco abuse or with a positive family history of cancer.

Most cancers are either preventable or can be detected earlier at a stage when a combined modality treatment could lead to a life of long cure. Today specialties involved in cancer management include surgery, clinical oncology (radiation oncology), medical oncology and clinical oncology. Earlier detection greatly enhances the effectiveness of cancer control and mainly surrounds around health education and cancer screening programs.

The aim of cancer control is a reduction in both the incidence of the disease and associated morbidity and mortality. Its achievement requires not only sound knowledge of the disease process but also an understanding of the social and economic factors which govern now that knowledge can be put to effective use. The following are the four principal approaches to control:

1. Prevention means or eliminating exposure to carcinogenic agents, and include reducing individual susceptibility to the effect of such agents. It is this approach that offers the greatest chance of successful long-term cancer control.

2. Increasing awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer contribute to early detection of disease. Where test for cancer of specific sites are available, screening of apparently healthy individuals can disclose cancer in precursor or early stages, when treatment will be most effective.
3. Cancer treatment is becoming increasingly effective, with the result that survival times in certain types of cancer now exceed 5years for more than half the patients in developed countries. However, 5year survival rate is around 20% in many developing countries, partly because of the unavailability of treatment but also because of the delay in seeking medical attention.

4. Palliative care is critical for most of the 5 million cancer patients in the world who die annually.

Awareness among the masses is the cornerstone in cancer prevention. Newer anti cancer drugs and latest equipment available can help fight cancer effectively. The notion "cancer ~death" no longer is accepted and cancer treatment has become extremely safe.

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