4 February 2018, Cairo – The world celebrates World Cancer Day on 4 February each year. This year’s theme “We can. I can” is a continuation of a 3-year campaign that explores, highlights and provides guidance on how everyone – together or individually – can help reduce the global burden of cancer.

The 2016–2018 World Cancer Day campaign explores the actions that we can all take to save lives, achieve greater equity in cancer care, and make fighting cancer a priority at the highest political levels. It reminds us as communities, governments, nongovernmental organizations and groups that we can inspire action, encourage others to take action, prevent cancer, and challenge misperceptions on cancer as a fatal untreatable disease. We can join forces and
orchestrate efforts to make a difference in the fight against cancer.

Cancer rates are increasing globally and regionally. It is among the top four leading causes of death in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, killing nearly 400 000 people every year. Cancer rates are expected to almost double in the next two decades, from an estimated 555 318 new cases in 2012 to nearly 961 098 in 2030 – the highest relative increase among all WHO regions.

A key action is to call on governments to step up their response to cancer by promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing exposure to risk factors that will reduce premature deaths, and improve quality of life and cancer survival rates. This is consistent with the commitment made by governments to “reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and well-being" as one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs), acknowledging that the SDG target will only be achieved if significant progress is made also in the prevention and control of cancer.

In 2017, Member States of WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region endorsed resolution EM/RC64/R.2 on a regional framework for action on cancer prevention and control which has been developed to scale up guidance to Member States and support implementation of the regional Framework for Action to implement the Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and recent World Health Assembly resolution (WHA70.12) on cancer prevention and control. The framework will assist in guiding decision-making on policy options and priority interventions for cancer prevention and control and enable Member States to determine which areas of cancer prevention and control need to be scaled up according to national contexts.

The World Cancer Day campaign stresses what can be done to improve access to cancer care and to better understand that early detection increases recovery chances and saves lives. It presents key messages and provides evidence to show that everyone has some power to take various actions so that no matter who you are – a cancer survivor, a co-worker, a cancer organization, a care provider, a friend, an employer or a student – information is made available to support and enable you to make a difference in the fight against cancer, make your voice heard, encourage you to ask for support and enhance your ability to control your cancer journey.

About a third of common cancers can be prevented through a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active. That’s where individuals can play vital roles. For
example, changes in the way we live mean that more and more people around the world are exposed to cancer risk factors like smoking, poor diet, and sedentary lifestyles. Educating and informing individuals and communities about the links between lifestyle and cancer risk is the first step in effective cancer prevention. Smoking is still the biggest cancer risk factor. Tobacco use accounts for 5 million deaths every year, or 22% of all cancer deaths. Reducing the rates of tobacco use will significantly decrease the global burden of a large number of cancers.

In this context, the campaign calls for schools to foster a culture of healthy choices and habits by providing nutritious food and drink choices, as well as time for recreation and sport, and putting practical education about food and physical activity on the school curriculum. Providing healthy choices in school canteens and cafeterias to ensure children have access to lower energy density meals and snacks, and to water as an alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages, can have a considerable influence on the development of positive attitudes towards food and promote healthy behaviours.

The Day also focuses also on creating healthy workplaces which provide a smoke-free environment, healthy food choices and good transportation to and from work. With the global labour force predicted to rise to 3.5 billion by 2030, there is a tremendous opportunity to harness the workplace as a platform for cancer prevention and early detection.

Other focuses of the campaign are to encourage a healthy city approach, supporting people with cancer to return to work and challenging misperceptions regarding cancer.

Governments, communities, schools, employers and the media can challenge perceptions about cancer and dispel damaging myths and misconceptions so that all people are empowered to access accurate cancer information and quality cancer prevention and care.

Related links

Challenging barriers to survival in the occupied Palestinian territory: World Cancer Day 2018

Cancer patients in Yemen face slow death as treatment options diminish
WHO ensures life-saving treatment for cancer patients in Syria with support from Kuwait

World Cancer Day official site

Resolution EM/RC64/R.2 Regional framework for action on cancer prevention and control

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