Accelerating action on cancer control can save lives

Cancer is ranked among the top four leading causes of death in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, following cardiovascular diseases, infectious diseases and injuries. The incidence is expected to almost double in the next 2 decades, from an estimated 555 318 new cases in 2012 to nearly 961 098 in 2030, the highest relative increase among all WHO regions. By 2030, cancer deaths are projected to reach 652 097 (up from 367 441 in 2012).

Half of cancers occur before age 55 years, and the majority of cancer cases are diagnosed at relatively advanced stages. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the most common cancers among men are lung, prostate, bladder, colorectum and stomach. The most common cancers among women are breast, cervix and colorectum.

Although the projections are based only on the effect of population growth and ageing, the additional effect of increasing exposures to cancer risk factors, such as smoking, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, and environmental pollution, will lead to an even bigger rise in the burden of cancer. The prevalence of these risk factors is likely to increase due to socioeconomic and cultural changes, placing significant strains on health programmes and causing substantial human suffering.

Cancer and noncommunicable diseases

Cancer is one of the four main noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs kill more than 2.2 million people annually i.e. over 57% of all deaths. Over half of NCD deaths are premature.

Can cancer be prevented?

Much of the cancer-related suffering and death in the Region is preventable. More systematic efforts are essential to reduce tobacco use, improve diet and physical activity, and expand the use of established screening tests.

Can cancer be cured?

Some of the common cancers are curable, such as colon, breast, lung, and prostate, but only if

caught in one of the first two stages, and treated effectively.

Can cancer be controlled?

Cancer can be reduced and controlled by implementing evidence-based strategies for cancer prevention, early detection of cancer and management of patients with cancer.

Many cancers have a high chance of cure if detected early and treated adequately.

Recommended actions

There is much that can be done at the individual, community and government levels to control cancer.

- · Choosing healthy lives.
- Ensuring early detection.
- · Maximizing quality of life.
- · Providing treatment for all.

Among WHO recommended actions for controlling cancer is to implement proven prevention strategies to curb the disease, including developing a clear roadmap to scale up cancer prevention, early detection, appropriate and timely therapy and palliative care, focusing on the most common cancers in the Region, registration and surveillance, and research.

Key message□

Solutions exist and are accessible to affect and reduce the global and regional cancer burden.

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