



Addressing the Challenges of Non-communicable Diseases: *Cancer*

“Non-communicable diseases have emerged as growing health problems for countries in every corner of the globe.”

- U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius

GLOBAL BURDEN

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer, represent an urgent and growing public health emergency for countries around the world.

According to the most recent statistics, cancer is the leading cause of death in developed countries, and the second leading cause of death in developing countries. In 2008, about 12.7 million cancer cases, and 7.6 million cancer deaths, occurred worldwide.

Developing countries face a disproportionate burden because they are least equipped to deal with cancer-related challenges; in fact, over 70% of cancer deaths occurred in developing countries. The incidence and mortality rates of cancer are increasing as the world's population ages and engages in unhealthy habits.

WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer begins in the body's cells when new cells fail to grow properly. Often, extra cells can form a mass of tissue called a tumor. Malignant tumors are more harmful than benign tumors and may be life-threatening. Cells from malignant tumors can spread to other parts of the body through the bloodstream in a process called metastasis, potentially harming organs.

RISK FACTORS

Although doctors often cannot explain why one person develops cancer and another does not,

research shows that certain habits increase the chance that a person will develop cancer. Tobacco consumption, alcohol abuse, inactivity, and an unhealthy diet can be significant risk factors, as are old age, genetic history, and environmental factors. Research has also shown that certain viruses can cause cancer. For example, the human papilloma virus (HPV) is

the main cause of cervical cancer. Scientists have developed an HPV vaccine that can reduce the chance of developing cervical cancer.

Major cancer risk factors:

- Tobacco usage
- Physical inactivity
- Alcohol abuse
- Unhealthy diet
- Old age
- Family history
- Environmental factors
- Chronic infections

SCREENING AND TREATMENT

Some types of cancer can be found before they cause symptoms. Checking for cancer in people who have no symptoms is called screening; this can help doctors find and treat some types of cancer early, when treatment is usually

most effective. Common screenings include the mammogram, which helps doctors detect breast cancer, the colonoscopy to detect colorectal cancer, and the Pap/VIA/HPV test to detect cervical cancer.

The type of treatment depends on the stage of the cancer, general health of the patient, and whether the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. Treatment methods may include radiation, surgery, chemotherapy, or a combination. Treatment plans often involve a variety of healthcare professionals, as well as family members, who can be supportive of adhering to treatment.