

World Cancer Day

Pictorial warnings vital to control disease

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ISLAMABAD - As the World Cancer Day is being observed across the country today (Thursday), the mounting number of cancer patients have called for serious efforts on the part of the authorities concerned to combat the fatal disease.

Facts regarding growing rate of the cancer are frightening in Pakistan, according to the health experts that with consumption of 78 billion cigarettes sticks annually Pakistan holds high rate of oral and lung cancer in the region.

The main objective behind the Day is to raise public awareness about this silent killer of million of the people around the globe. Tobacco related cancers have been remained a challenge for Pakistan so far.

According to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the lung cancer is a vital cause of deaths in males followed by mouth cancer. Both these cancers are tobacco related and can be prevented, if the powerful addictive substance is avoided.

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world as the WHO estimated that 84 million people would die of cancer between 2005 and 2015. The WHO every year supports the International Union Against Cancer (IUAC) to focus on the significance of reducing global burden of cancer.

Facts regarding growing rate of cancer are frightening in Pakistan as the health experts consider lung cancer as

the direst cause for deaths in Pakistani males. Figures from the Agha Khan University shows that over 90 percent of such cases are caused by the tobacco-use.

It is not by accident that tobacco-use has become an epidemic but lack of public health awareness and poor implementation of tobacco control laws put down the efforts for its control. Pakistan, with half of the population is illiterate and not well aware of the health consequences of tobacco use. The world-wide pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs and other tobacco packaging are used to raise awareness among public regarding hazards of tobacco use. These horrific picture based warnings are a proven way to inform the tobacco consumers about the deadly effects of the tobacco.

The Network Executive Director, Dr Arif Azad in his remarks said the Government of Pakistan announced introduction of pictorial warnings in 2009, which marked a leap forward in the history of tobacco control in country. One and a half-year down the road, the pictorial warning legislation has yet to see light of the day.

A twice announced and twice delayed pictorial warning is contributing to already piling up mountain of tobacco deaths. Any further delay would add 273 deaths to this mountain on a daily basis.

"The World Cancer Day only underscores the need of introducing pictorial warnings on

cigarette packs by February 2010. By speedy implementation of pictorial warning the consumption of tobacco can be curbed drastically as shown by various international studies. This would go a long in reducing incidence of cancer on the whole," he said.

Almost 50 percent of all the cancer cases in the country are directly linked with tobacco use. Tobacco use in the forms of Gutka, 'pan masala' and snuff is also another major cause of oral cancers. Gutka and 'pan masala' are commonly consumed in various parts of country and causing a rise in head, neck and mouth cancers. The situation is alarming for the health authorities as Pakistan currently tops in the incidences of oral cancers.

Eight of the most frequent cancers in men (lung, oral, cavity, larynx, urinary bladder, pharynx, oesophagus and prostate) and two of ten most common cancers in females (oral cavity and oesophagus) are associated with tobacco use. Oral cavity cancer in Karachi is reported second in both genders with similar rate in both. The incidence again is the highest reported worldwide. The highest recorded rate for larynx cancer for males in Asia is seen in Karachi.

This year, the theme of the World Cancer Day is "Cancers can be prevented too" is not only a ray of hope for the cancer patients world-wide but a signal for the policy makers to take stringent measures to control the killing disease.