

84m people to die of cancer in next 10 years

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Of the 58 million deaths reported worldwide in 2005, 7.6 million were cancer-related; another 84 million people will die of the disease in the next 10 years if action is not taken now.

More than 70% of all cancer deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, where resources available for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer are limited or non-existent. Based on projections, cancer deaths will continue to rise with an estimated 9 million people dying from it in 2015, 10 million in 2020 and 11.4 million in 2030.

This data was shared by Professor Dr. Muhammad Ashraf Chaudhry, head of Community Medicine at the Islamabad Medical and Dental College, in connection with World Cancer Day, which is observed worldwide on February 4 to raise public awareness about this silent killer disease. This year's theme, 'Cancer can be prevented too,' focuses on simple measures that can be taken to prevent cancer;

these include cessation of tobacco use, consumption of a healthy diet, regular physical activity, end to alcohol use and protection against cancer-causing infections.

Cancer affects everyone and represents a tremendous burden on families and societies. Cancer can be described as the uncontrolled growth and spread of cells. It can affect almost any part of the body. The growth often invades surrounding tissue and can metastasize to distant sites. Lung, stomach, liver, colon and breasts are the most common sites of cancer.

Dr. Ashraf said, the seven warning signals of cancer are: change in bowel or bladder habit, a sore that does not heal, unusual bleeding or discharge, thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere, indigestion or difficulty in swallowing, obvious change in wart or mole and nagging cough or hoarseness. He said the four basic components of cancer control are prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, and palliative care. At least one-third of all cancer cases are preventable.

The public health specialist termed tobacco as the single largest preventable cause of cancer in the world today. Dietary modification is another important approach to cancer control.

Dr. Ashraf informed that about one-third of the cancer burden can be decreased through early detection and treatment.

Meanwhile, the executive coordinator of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection Dr. Arif Azad cited figures from Aga Khan University to show almost 50% of all cancer cases in Pakistan are directly linked with tobacco use. "It is not by accident that tobacco use has become an epidemic. Lack of public health awareness and poor implementation of tobacco control laws in a country where half of the population is illiterate and hence unaware of the health consequences of tobacco use presents a major challenge," he stated.

Dr. Arif regretted that "The government announced introduction of pictorial warnings in 2009 but one and a half year down the road, pictorial warn-

ings legislation has yet to see light of the day. The twice announced and twice delayed pictorial warnings are contributing to the already piling up mountain of tobacco deaths. Any further delay would add 273 deaths to this mountain on a daily basis." He believes that Pakistan, with a consumption of 78 billion cigarette sticks annually and highest rate of oral and lung cancer in the region, can reduce the burden by implementing pictorial warnings in time.

Omer Aftab, national coordinator of Pink Ribbon said, Pakistan has the highest rate of breast cancer for any Asian population. He underscored the need to focus on prevention rather than cure as breast cancer is the only cancer which, if diagnosed early, can have a survival rate of more than 90%. He urged the Ministry of Health to set up a National Cancer Registry and to expedite the National Breast Screening Programme to save the precious lives being lost every day on account of the rising incidence of cancer.