

World Cancer Day 2015

**Early
Detection
Not Beyond Us**



Ensuring the availability of, and access to, early detection programmes for cancer can significantly reduce the cancer burden in all countries.

The World Cancer Declaration Targets to be achieved by 2025:

- 🕒 **Target 6** - Population-based screening and early detection programmes will be universally implemented, and levels of public and professional awareness about important cancer warning signs and symptoms will have improved
- 📝 **Target 9** - Innovative education and training opportunities for healthcare professionals in all disciplines of cancer control will have improved significantly, particularly in low- and middle-income countries

Meeting this challenge is not beyond us if we work together to:

- Raise awareness about cancer among communities, health professionals and policy makers
- Integrate early detection and screening into health systems, and
- Invest in a skilled workforce to deliver early detection

The Challenge

- Early signs and symptoms are not known for all cancers, but for many cancers, including breast, cervical, colorectal, skin, oral, and some childhood cancers, the benefits of implementing planned approaches to early detection and care are clear. Despite the evidence, for many populations, particularly in low-resource settings, the value of early detection and the importance of seeking care when symptoms are present are not understood, even among health professionals.
- Many low-resource settings face a critical shortage of trained health professionals, which is a key barrier to the delivery of effective and quality early detection.

Meeting The Challenge

Raising awareness about cancer

- Early detection programmes should aim to improve knowledge of cancer among communities, health professionals and policy makers and increase awareness around the options for early detection. Understanding and responding to cultural beliefs and practices is essential, particularly in settings where misconceptions about diagnosis and treatment; stigma associated with cancer; and gender and social inequities can lead individuals to delay care or to avoid seeking help altogether.
- Strategies must be developed to encourage help-seeking behaviour, including awareness and education of ways to recognise the signs and symptoms for some cancers and understanding that early detection will increase the opportunities for cure and improved quality of life for people living with the disease.
- Fostering greater awareness of early detection is possible in many community settings including the workplace, which can be an effective communication channel for educational messages.

Integrating tailored early detection & screening services into health systems

- Recognition of early warning signs of some cancers is particularly relevant in the context of primary care in low-resource settings – it is cost-effective and in some cases does not require any specialist technologies, as is the case with check-ups for oral cancers and clinical breast examinations for breast cancer.
- For childhood cancers, equipping primary healthcare workers with the knowledge and tools to recognise the warning signs and symptoms of paediatric cancer is essential to reduce the likelihood of misdiagnosis and ensure prompt referral to specialist medical care.
- For breast, colorectal and cervical cancers, there is robust evidence to support the implementation of population-based screening programmes that are tailored to the countries' resources and burden of disease. There is strong evidence that screening can reduce deaths from cervical cancer by 80% or more among screened women. Even a single screening between the ages of 30 and 40 can reduce a woman's lifetime risk of cervical cancer by 25% to 36%.

- Unfortunately, some of the cancers with the poorest survival rates are those which are rarely detected until they are at an advanced stage, such as ovarian and pancreatic cancers. More research is required on the early detection of these and other cancer types.

Investing in a skilled workforce to deliver early detection

- Investment in continuing professional development to equip healthcare workers with the appropriate tools and knowledge to recognise the early signs and symptoms of some cancers, as well as to perform appropriate early detection measures, is essential.

It is Not Beyond Us to meet the challenge if...

- Awareness is recognised as the first step to early detection and improving cancer outcomes, because with few exceptions, early stage cancers are less lethal and more treatable than late stage cancers.
- The approach and scope of an early detection programme are tailored to resources as well as cultural beliefs and practices, with the flexibility for governments to expand services as resources increase.
- Screening programmes are integrated into health systems.
- There is adequate investment in health personnel in all settings but particularly in low-resource settings, where education of frontline health staff is critical for a successful early detection strategy.
- Innovative education and training programmes for cancer healthcare professionals are developed that build on existing materials, training networks and infrastructure.

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