

## Letter to Editor

### Increasing Burden of Cancer in Pakistan

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**Dear Editor,**

Globally, cancer related mortalities are the second common cause of death and caused estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018,<sup>1</sup> whereas in Pakistan, cancers (8%) are the leading cause of demise along with ischemic heart disease (8%) and respiratory infections (8%).<sup>1,2</sup> 70% of deaths occurring worldwide were in developing countries due to lack of screening, late diagnosis and inaccessibility to treatment, 30% compared to 90% in high income states.<sup>1</sup>

In 2018, 173937 new patients were diagnosed to have cancer and 118442 cancer related deaths were reported in Pakistan with 310132 prevalent cancer cases over the last 5 years.<sup>3</sup> This recent surge in oncological cases is alarming and demands timely intervention to halt the progression of cancer related mortalities as cancers that are seen in Pakistani population are those that are preventable and curable if early detected on screening with appropriate management. Breast cancers, Oral cavity cancers and Lung cancers have the highest incidence and mortality rate among the Pakistani population.<sup>4</sup>

Frequent cancers seen in Pakistani population regardless of the gender in the last year were breast cancer (19.6%), followed by oral cavity cancers (10.9%) and lung cancers (5.6%). In males, there is a high incidence of Oral cavity and lip cancers (15.9%), lung cancers (9.8%), esophageal cancers (5.8%) and prostatic cancers (5.6%), whereas in females, breast cancers (36.8%), oral cavity cancers (6.4%) and cervical cancers (6%) are prevalent.<sup>4</sup>

Common misperceptions regarding diseases and lack of knowledge and awareness about environmental and genetic risk factors of different types of cancers have contributed to increase incidence of cancers in Pakistani population. Insufficient surgical and medical oncology services nationwide, inadequate

cancer screening campaigns and high cost cancer treatment are also significant factors leading to increase in cancer related mortalities.

Screening allows early detection of various carcinomas aiding in management of the disease at the earliest stage, as majority of the neoplastic conditions that are common in Pakistani population have good prognosis.

Non-affordability of the treatment is another challenge that is faced by the residents of this developing country. Pakistan has few renowned non-governmental organizations that are providing oncology treatment free of cost, but rising number of patients has led to the inability of these institutes to facilitate patients requiring palliation. Lack of palliative care centers is another dilemma of the country.

Public awareness campaigns, outreach programs for high risk population, establishment of oncology and palliative centers, provision of support and grants to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can help in reducing cancer related morbidities and mortalities.

#### References

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