

Addressing the Global Public Health Concern of Childhood Cancers

Dear Sir,

Cancer has been identified as the most common cause of mortality among children and adolescents, with 0.3 million children being diagnosed with cancer globally on an annual basis.^[1] Due to the general fact that it is difficult to prevent or screen childhood cancer and thus for improving the outcomes, early diagnosis and delivery of prompt and effective treatment is the need of the hour.^[1,2] The epidemiological analysis has led to the identification of various factors such as genetic, infections, and environmental in the development of these cancers.^[1]

It has been estimated that four-fifth of the cancers reported in high-income nations can be cured, while on the contrast, only one-fifth are eventually cured in developing nations.^[1] In fact, factors such as limited diagnostic services, inaccessible treatment modalities, side effects of the drugs, and advanced stages of cancer, has been identified as the potential factors for the poor outcomes in developing nations.^[1] As a matter of fact, the detection of cancers at an early stage and reduction in the delays in care, there is a significant improvement in the chances of survival, minimizes suffering and expenditure and less invasive forms of treatment.^[1,2]

Early diagnosis comprises three aspects, namely, increasing the awareness among the community, promoting clinical evaluation, diagnosis and staging, and enhancing the access to all forms of treatment (namely, surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy).^[1] This can be accomplished by the involvement of all the concerned stakeholders and sectors.^[2,3] In fact, these cancers are linked with multiple warning symptoms, and which can be identified either through the family members or through the outreach health workers.^[1] Mere diagnosis of cancer will not be of any use, if it is not supported by the specific and effective therapy, and this essentially includes access to different forms of treatment, generic drugs, blood products and counseling or psychosocial support.^[1,3,4]

Furthermore, to improve the quality of life, it is essential to deliver quality assured palliative care.^[1] This is primarily because even though, the cure rate among children is not 100%, and nevertheless, measures are definitely available to minimize the sufferings for everyone.^[1,3] It is high time that palliative care is regarded as the integral component of the care which

is offered to children with cancers either in the hospitals or in the domiciliary settings.^[1] In short, the ultimate need is to ensure that the treatment component remains cost-effective universally.^[1-3]

Acknowledging the magnitude of the problem, prevailing shortcomings and a definite scope to improve the existing things, the World Health Organization launched a global initiative to ensure the survival of three-fifths of the childhood cancers by 2030.^[1] In other words, this will amount to doubling the current survival rates, and thus will require increased political commitment, better financial support, and the establishment of high-quality cancer centers for the expedition of proper diagnosis and treatment services.^[1-3] In addition, there is an immense need to financially support the families who have been exposed to catastrophic expenditure in the process of seeking treatment for their children.^[1,4]

In conclusion, childhood cancer is an important global public health problem, and there is a significant need for capacity building and infrastructure support to reduce the magnitude as well as the deaths attributed to the same.

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Conflicts of interest

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