
World Cancer Day 2019: Act urgently to improve early cancer detection

World Cancer Day 2019 © UICC

Nearly five million cases of breast, cervical, colorectal and oral cancers diagnosed in 2018 could have been detected sooner and treated more effectively, said the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) to mark World Cancer Day, 4 February.

Barriers to achieving higher rates of early cancer detection need to be addressed now at the individual, health system, and governmental level to significantly reduce the personal and financial burden of cancer worldwide, added UICC. Early detection, screening, and diagnosis have been proven to significantly improve patient survival rates and quality of life as well as significantly reduce the cost and complexity of cancer treatment.

For example, in India a study among rural women with cervical cancer found the five-year survival rate to be 9% when diagnosed at Stage IV, but the rate soared to 78% when diagnosed at Stage I.

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A US study estimates the national cost savings from early diagnosis of cancer at \$26 billion per year. A study of Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia found early intervention initiatives such as cervical cancer smear tests, colonoscopy screenings, and mammography screenings (combined with treatment) to be “highly cost effective”.

Strong early detection and timely diagnosis measures must be a part of any country’s National Cancer Control Plan, alongside concrete measures to improve cancer prevention, treatment, and care, said UICC. By implementing resource-appropriate strategies on prevention, early detection and treatment, up to 3.7 million lives can be saved every year.

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