

Curing the Incurable



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drgits 5 February 2012 10926 views

Life is a challenge and every one must accept it. Every individual has to overcome several hurdles which seem impossible at first instance. With confident efforts one has to make the impossible possible. The same is applicable to the field of health. Treatment depends on the patients, their trust and cooperation. Diseases that were considered to be incurable in the past are curable today. If someone thinks diseases are a curse, then they should also know that medical science is for sure a boon. That is the reason why today the world is in a period of time where once an incurable disease (believed to be) like Cancer is curable.

Cancer or 'Silent Killer' (for a common man) is the most scared disease. It is one of the oldest disease in existence since the age of dinosaurs. Globally it is responsible for the second highest number of deaths after heart diseases and accounts to 8% of deaths in India. Heart diseases are limited only to the heart or cardiovascular system, but cancer has no limits or boundaries. It can start form anywhere in the human body and can spread to any part. It does not discriminate regarding religion, age, gender, region or color. Over 1 million cases of cancer are detected every year in India. It is one of the common health hazard and a leading heath problem not only in India but in the entire world. In a developed country like USA, 30,000 cases of head and neck cancer are detected every year. In India around 200,000 cases of head and neck cancer occur annually. Increasing number of head and neck cancer cases are associated with high morbidity and mortality.

For a common man cancer means death because it cannot be treated. No one tries to know and understand the actual causes and reasons. It is a disease of the cells wherein the uncontrolled division and growth of cells give rise to a mass. This process takes several years to form a mass. One can feel the mass only when it becomes bigger in size during the last stage when treatments become ineffective. If one can detect the formation of the mass at the initial stage, the growth of mass can be stopped and can be eliminated and uprooted using various methods. If the mass is detected at an early stage, it can be stopped from entering into the phase of cancer. That is why most cancer treatments are not successful and general people take this as the way towards death. Medical science has been making several successful researches, and so cancer is no a cause of fear. It neither means death nor does it mean any curse. To treat cancer, it should be detected early and the warning signs understood well. Unusual bleeding, change in mole size, unhealed ulcers, difficulty in swallowing, change in voice, change in bowel habits, fish bone sensation in the throat, and formation of lump may be signs of the onset of cancer.

As per data, 30% of cancer cases in India are related to cervix. The second spot is occupied by breast cancer at 20% and 5% of cases are contributed by ovarian cancer. Over 1/3rd of cancer in India occur in the head and neck regions and is very common in the NorthEast Indian States. The most common head and neck cancer in India is the oropharyngeal cancer with 28.6% in the graph followed by tongue cancer (32.7%), oral cancer (19.4%) and 20% of the cases are related to buccal mucosa and tonsil. Looking at the gender distributions in India males develop higher chances of developing head and neck cancer in the ratio of 3:1 whereas globally women develop high risk of any cancer at 1:4. In a private institute in North East India 4000 (in round figures) cases of cancer were recorded between the years 2008 and 2011 out of which 59% appeared to be males and 41% females. The percentage of head and neck cancer was about 55% with 700 males and 150 females. Divided into the stages the highest number of patients are found to be in the 4th or last stage. Patients detected in the 4th stage are 65%. Percentage of patients in the 1st , 2nd and 3rd stages are 2%, 8% and 25% respectively.

Cancer cases are managed and treated using radiation therapy, surgery, chemotherapy and concomitant chemo radiation therapy. In the field of head, neck and esophageal cancer radiation therapy is known as the 'Soul Treatment'. High doses of ionizing radiation is used to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. It is used as neo adjuvant or pre operative, adjuvant or post operative, curative and palliative treatments. Surgery is the most common choice of treatment in most of the cancers including head and neck cancer. It means the complete removal of tumor along with the surrounding affected tissues and lymph nodes. Chemotherapy means the treatment of cancer using drugs. High toxic drugs are given through veins or orally to attack the cancer cells and inhibit their growth. It is also used as curative, neo adjuvant and adjuvant treatments. In case of head and neck cancer chemotherapy is hardly advised mostly used for palliative purposes. Concomitant chemo radiation therapy is also widely advised in cases related to head and neck cancer. In this treatment chemotherapy is given parallel to radiation therapy as supportive. Chemotherapy act as fuel and radiation therapy act as fire in these cases. Maximum number of cases are treated using concomitant chemo radiation therapy (44%) where as 30%, 20% and 6% treated through radiation therapy, surgery and chemotherapy respectively. There are other necessary managements also like diet management, pain and palliative management, psychological management and symptomatic management of side effects.

Evidences of successful cancer cases are many. Cancer patients are treated, healed and today living with outmost respect and dignity in the society. A 60 year old lady was detected with breast cancer. Six years back she had surgery (to get the affected part removed) followed by 6 cycles of chemotherapy. For two years she was prescribed hormone based medicine (Tamoxifen) which reduces the risk of cancer in the future. Now since the last four years she is living a normal healthy life. In another case a woman with cervical cancer in an advance stage received 25 fractions of radiation therapy and later underwent surgery. After one year when she came on follow up, she was found to be completely cancer free. A male patient with a 20 year old swollen parotid gland was operated upon and found to be to his initial stage of cancer after biopsy. After receiving 30 fractions of radiation therapy he was cured to the best. The swelling of the parotid gland could have been prevented if the patient would have paid due attention to it. Another patient with advance case of cancer in buccal mucosa with skin, mandible and neck involvement was treated through long term surgery and radiation therapy. The patient subscribed some traditional treatment for two years and agreed to undergo surgery when the disease spread and could not be healed. Today he is in a much better condition. A lady with cancer in the larynx was denying surgery after radiation therapy. He was scared of losing her voice forever. After proper consultation she was operated and provox (artificial voice box) inserted after removing her entire larynx. He was trained with voice therapy after few months. She could not retain her natural voice but now she can properly communicate with others. Many patients with lung and esophageal cancer cases are successfully treated to heal with radiation therapy. Cases like stomach, colorectal and intestinal cancers are brought to results through surgery. Various cancers cases are controlled and cured using chemotherapy. The list of positive results and successful cancer treatments are boundless.

Cancer patients are unfortunate but it does not mean that they are heading towards death. Cancer behaves like an epidemic which tries to spread but it can be certainly stopped. It is 'bad luck' if patients fall into the trap of a devil like cancer but to come out of its trap depends on the patients' willpower and timely treatments. They have to struggle, fight and even suffer for sometime to drive the devil out of their lives. Death is certain for every life. To avoid treatments of cancer and neglect the warning signs and symptoms of it might mean to invite death before time. We cannot achieve victory over death but we can gain triumph over a disease like cancer and live a healthy life if we keep ourselves alert and responsible. This way we can cure the incurable. Whenever our lands were attacked by evil, messengers of God were born to chase them away - an old but true saying.

(On the Occasion of World Cancer Day on February 4)

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