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I CAN & I WILL

When diagnoised with Cancer, most people get into "Why Me"syndrome trying all means to find an answer. It is natural for everyone to do so; our inquisitive mind needs an anwer. Honestly there is no answer to this question. Insted, you can help yourself to get ready and prepare for cancer treatment. Looking after your mental health plays a significant factor during your cancer experience. It might be at diagnosis, during treatment or once treatment has finished. Taking care of your mental health will improve the quality of your life.

> **Finding a balance between preparation and acceptance helps in coping with cancer treatment.**
>
> Amar Bhaskar

CHILDHOOD CANCER – HOW TO SUPPORT THE YOUNG WARRIORS

Dr. Rasmi Palassery
Consultant Medical Oncology, Ramiah Memorial Hospital, Bengaluru

Dr Rasmi started the session with talking about what is cancer- a collection of related diseases. Cancer starts in one part of body where cells start multiply uncontrollably. A global initiative was launched few years ago by WHO, where all the children in the world should get the treatment. She went on and explained about Metastasis where some cancer cells can break off and travel to distant places in the body. It may spread through blood or lymph system. It forms new tumors far from the original one.

So, what causes cancer? It is a genetic disease, each cell has nucleus, we have chromosomes, and which has master program for your body. It decides what is going to have in the body. So how genetic changes happen? Mutation of error in the gene, stops them becoming normal cell.

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This can be inherited from parents by birth too. Mutation can happen due to tobacco, radiations, plastic, environmental pollution- eventually results in cancer. Age is also concern as body's ability to fix the error becomes less. Other causes can be diet, obesity, chronic infections, which may boost cancer. People think that cancer cases has increased but more diagnosis is happening. Few years back reporting was not so good. There are 19.3 million cancer cases worldwide and India is third after China and US and has 57.5% cases of all.

Childhood Cancer is common cause for the deaths between 5-14 yrs of age in India. Nearly 20-50 thousand new childhood cancer cases / year. Now close to 1 lac / year. 75% of children die due to lack of awareness, late detection, inadequate treatment facilities and increasing cost of treatment and lack of supportive care.

Most childhood cancer causes are not known. About 5% are caused by inherited mutation. It is difficult to determine what children might have been exposed to early in their developemnet. Most common is blood cancer in child.

Treatment is similar to adults – surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, targeted therapy, hormone therapy and stem cell transplant. The survival rate for childhood leukemia is 80-85%.

Doctor spoke in detail about each type of cancer in children and their treatment. Bone cancers in kids are metastatic and survival chances falls hence early diagnosis is very important. Late effects of cancer treatment is unique for childhood cancer. Health problems can develop months or years after cancer treatment and can last many years, like changes in neuro-cognition, hearing, vision, hormonal change s- growth, puberty, reproductive concerns, risk of developing secondary cancers.

Living with cancer as a child can be difficult. They understand concept, so answer the curiosity appropriately. Doctor also discussed the sibling and parents' perspective – let family, friends know about it and how they can help. India is improving with better treatment, supportive care, survival care and re integrating them to normal life, focusing on the late development.

IF YOU FIND THIS MEANINGFUL, DO SHARE IT WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND DO INFORM US OF THEIR E-MAIL ID SO THAT WE CAN ADD THEM TO THE MAILING LIST.

Mitra Sandesh

Mitra Article

GENETIC ASSESSMENT IN CANCER: PANDORA'S BOX OR HOLY GRAIL

Dr. Swaroop

MD radiation oncology, DM medical oncology, MRCP SCE medical oncology

The rise of genetic testing and counseling has added value to the management of cancer, particularly for those cancers with underlying inheritable germline mutations. Identifying these mutations can not only provide critical insights for personal treatment strategies but also offer valuable information for the patient's family members who may be at risk. However, the benefits of hereditary testing and counseling are accompanied by significant social implications that must be carefully navigated.

One primary ethical concern revolves around privacy and the potential for genetic discrimination. Information about an individual's genetic predisposition to cancer can be sensitive, and there is a risk that this information could be misused by employers or insurance companies. Despite legal protections like the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) in the United States, no such framework exists in India.

Informed consent is another critical issue. Patients must fully understand the implications of genetic testing, including the possibility of uncovering mutations that not only affect their own cancer risk but also have ramifications for their relatives. This knowledge can create a heavy psychological burden. For example, learning about a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation can lead to anxiety, stress, and difficult decisions regarding preventive measures such as prophylactic surgeries or more intensive surveillance.

Furthermore, the social implications of hereditary testing extend to familial relationships. The discovery of a hereditary cancer syndrome can affect family dynamics, sometimes causing tension or guilt among family members.

Those who test positive for a genetic mutation may feel a responsibility to inform relatives who might also be at risk, leading to difficult conversations and potential conflicts. On the other hand, genetic counseling can be empowering. It enables individuals to make informed decisions about their health and lifestyle, pursue personalized surveillance and prevention strategies, and participate in early detection initiatives. Families equipped with this knowledge can take proactive steps to mitigate risks and improve outcomes, fostering a collective approach to health.

Ethical genetic counseling must prioritize the patient's autonomy, confidentiality, and psychological well-being. Genetic counselors play a crucial role in this process, providing not only medical information but also emotional support, helping patients understand the benefits and limitations of testing, and guiding them through the decision-making process.

In conclusion, while hereditary cancer testing and counseling offer significant advantages in managing cancer risk, they must be approached with careful consideration of the ethical and social challenges involved. Ensuring that patients receive comprehensive support and protection against discrimination is essential for the responsible integration of genetic testing into standard cancer care.

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