

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Cancer Incidence Still Increasing”

Cancer is expected to become the leading cause of mortality and the greatest barrier to increasing life expectancy in every country in the 21st century. The rapid worldwide growth in cancer incidence and mortality reflect aging and growth of the population; changes in the prevalence and distribution of the main risk factors for cancer, some of which are linked to socioeconomic development; and marked declines in mortality rates of stroke and coronary heart disease compared with cancer in many countries. Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) now cause most deaths worldwide. In 2018, an estimated 18.1 million new cases cancer were diagnosed globally, and 9.6 million died from the disease. One in 5 men and 1 in 6 women worldwide will develop cancer during their lifetime, and 1 in 8 men and 1 in 11 women will die from cancer. Cancer incidence and mortality are rapidly growing worldwide. Worldwide, the total number of people who are alive within 5 years of a cancer diagnosis (the 5-year prevalence) is estimated to be 43.8 million. The increasing cancer burden is due to several factors, including population growth and ageing. Regarding incidence, cancers of the lung, female breast, and colorectum top the list and fall within the top 5 for mortality (first, fifth, and second, respectively). These 3 cancer types represent one-third of cancer incidence and mortality globally. In both sexes combined, lung cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer (11.6% of total cases), and the leading cause of cancer death (18.4% of total deaths). This is followed by female breast cancer (11.6%), prostate cancer (7.1%), and colorectal cancer (6.1%) in incidence and by colorectal cancer (9.2%), stomach cancer (8.2%), and liver cancer (8.2%) for mortality. Among men, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer incidence and mortality, followed by prostate and colorectal cancer (for incidence) and liver and stomach cancer (for mortality). Among women, breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer incidence and mortality, followed by colorectal and lung cancer (for incidence) and by lung and colorectal cancer (for mortality). Eliminating or lowering exposure to known lifestyle and environmental risk factors could prevent from one-third to two-fifths of new cancer cases. In 2011, British experts reported, "Nearly half of cancers diagnosed in the UK each year are caused by avoidable life choices including smoking, drinking and eating the wrong things. Tobacco is the biggest culprit, causing 23% of cases in men and 15.6% in women. Surprisingly, experts found nearly a 10th of the risk of breast cancer in women comes from being overweight or obese.

In the America that I love, we should focus on cancer prevention. Also, keep in mind that early detection is key to survival. Discuss these issues with your doctor.

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