



Short Communication

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“Cancer a Life Sentence, Not a Death Sentence”

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Cancer which engulfed the health economy and health infrastructure for more than a century, which changed the lifestyle of many people, which challenged the politicians and dominant industries to bow in front of it...

Or

In simple words the “Emperor of all Maladies”
is Lung Cancer.

This day is meant to raise and create awareness about lung cancer. Cancer was synonyms to lung cancer in early 20th century, and it took nearly 100+ years to change its trajectory. Though old day movies and televisions shows, portrayed it as an incurable disease, its management took a paradigm shift in past few decades. Advanced medicines/operative techniques/public awareness helped a lot to achieve this milestone.

As we all think, whatever the recent advancement exists currently, the patients are not going to have a usual life as others. Yes, it may be true, but not completely. Yes, it drains the patient and their family physically, mentally and financially. It tests owns inner hope and sanity. Questions the meaning of their own existence and creates existential vacuum.

But along with that it gives them a reason, self-awareness, courage and helps in redefining their goals. Yes guys, what I said is true. This is the other side of the coin, which we often fail to elicit from cancer patients/warriors. Cancer as we consider as a death sentence, it actually a life sentence for many.

This assumption of cancer a death sentence exists among both the patients and general public. All of us have to confront to illness at some point in our life, the extent to which we extrapolate it with death decides our behavior. Often people are motivated to avoid or escape situations, which reminds them of death, especially when there are no viable opportunities to completely avoid fatal outcomes. To the extent the people associate cancer with death, they may avoid seeking health care for a variety of reasons, such as fear of having the illness. This indirectly hampers the cancer screening programs and its utility.

A recent study quotes that “equating cancer with death is associated with lower education” and “men are more likely to avoid seeking health care than women”. An interesting factor to notice here is people who have personal experience with cancer, either themselves or through a family members are less likely to think of cancer as a death sentence and less likely to avoid seeking doctors.

Does Cancer survivors an issue for society? Does Cancer survivors impose significant economic burden on their family and society? Big NO. Stigmatization, misunderstanding, life long issues of confidence and social adaptation and even access to employment and financial services are the big problems faced by cancer survivors nowadays. Its neither the fault of cancer nor that of patients. We, the society are at fault, who always look them through our own perspectives.

Post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive psychological change, as a result of a struggle with highly challenging life crises or trauma like cancer. It brings out positive outcomes like greater appreciation of life, improved interpersonal relationships, spirituality, and new possibilities in life that exceed the levels present prior to experiencing the highly challenging life crisis. This enhancement in life has been reported in patients experienced breast cancer, Liver carcinoma, head and neck cancer, colorectal carcinoma, gynecological cancer, lymphoma, and leukemia.

Does this growth can be developed in all cancer patients?? Yes, it can be cultivated. Hope is the key. Higher level of hope helps the individuals to rethink and reorganize themselves. Other key parameters are social support (particularly spousal support), religiosity, spirituality and active disclosure of trauma related events to family members, all helps in finding a life and construct meaning out of it.

Though the recent advances in cancer treatment are revolutionizing and continue to enhance life among cancer survivors. The importance of cancer awareness/education, social support, psychological support and political support are essential to prove that Cancer is a life sentence, not a death sentence. On this World Lung Cancer Day 2022, we unite to break the myths/illusions/disbeliefs around cancer care. Let’s cancer awareness and cure reach every nook and corner of the globe.

“Certainly, living in the last half of the 20th century, one would have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to be aware of the asserted dangers, real or imagined, of cigarette smoking. Yet the personal choice to smoke is..... the same kind of choice as the driver who downed the beers, and then the telephone pole” - Open letter from tobacco industry, 1988 sums it up pretty well.