

CANCER: A DEADLY DISEASE

Reality of Cancer in Nigeria & Need to Break the Cycle of Ignorance

Do you know that 80,000 Cancer deaths occur in Nigeria per year and 10 Nigerians die every hour from Cancer ... and yet a chill goes down our spines when we loose a whole plane load of passengers!

While the prognosis (outcome) for several forms of cancer have improved over the last decade in developed countries, mostly due to vast technological and scientific advancements, the outlook remains grim in Nigeria. The available statistics bear this out, showing that; 70 percent of cancer deaths occur in developing nations, like Nigeria, due to lack of access to optimal care. Nigeria is currently estimated to have 233,911 cancer cases, with 124,815 new cases and 78,899 cancer deaths, yearly.(WHO Feb 2022). The actual figures are probably much higher due to extremely limited documentation of cancer cases in the country. Across Africa, just 5% of childhood cancers are cured, compared to a cure rate of nearly 80% in the developed world, resulting in an estimated 100,000 children dying from cancer in the developing world each year.

The awareness level of Nigerian women to Breast/Cervical Cancer 'best practices' & Nigerian men, to Prostate/Colorectal Cancers, is very low, even this is dogged by procrastination, fear, denial ('It is not my portion syndrome'), socio-economic, & superstitious/cultural restraints. This has given rise to the 'crisis of the cancer scourge in our environment' – for e.g: more than 83-87% of affected women, present late, incurring unaffordable bills of 150,000 -350,000 naira every 3 weeks on drug treatment, followed closely by rapid deterioration and death, with resultant high morbidity and mortality in young and middle age groups when they are best productive in contributing to the socio-economic development of our nation!

Late presentation of Breast/Cervical, & other cancers will continue to increase in Nigeria, unless we do something more proactive than we have been doing in the past!

These are distressing statistics, given the fact that over one third of cancer deaths, result from potentially preventable causes and much of the suffering and death from cancer could be prevented by more systematic efforts, of ; expanding awareness & the use of established Vaccinations/screening tests, to reduce; viral infections, wrong nutrition choices, physical inactivity, obesity, widespread tobacco use, & alcohol abuse!

WHY BWS WAS BORN

BWS was born to provide those systematic efforts, to contain these distressing statistics!

Breast Without Spot (BWS) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization registered under the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC/IT/NO 33047). Its headquarters is in Enugu state, Nigeria

Vision: To have a world devoid of late detection of cancer and other non-communicable diseases.

Mission: To reduce the burden of death due to late cancer/other NCD detection through health education, screening, vaccination, training and research on cancers and non- communicable diseases.

BWS: A cause to increase awareness of cancer prevention & Achieve Early Detection

#gopinkdayngbws, #crushcancerwithbws

BWS believes NCDs[non-communicable diseases], such as Cancer, Diabetes, Chronic Kidney/ Cardiovascular diseases, etc, are preventable and thus focuses primarily on raising awareness at the grassroots/urban level and among the youths, encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyles and habits that prevent and reduce exposure to risk factors of NCDs!

Our efforts aim to achieve an attitudinal impact in up to 99.9% of Nigerians ASAP, thus BWS uses community-based education to build a cadre of 'Cancer Awareness Activists' [Children, Youth & Women Army] who search for opportunities to create awareness about cancers\other NCDs, to women and men groups, on one-on one bases, OPERATING ' THE POWER OF ONE'.

BWS, builds on this concerted advocacy by organizing mass screening programs, for breast cancer early detection using clinical breast examination and ultrasound; screening for cervical cancer by PAP smear, Liquid Cytology and visual inspection methods, screening for prostate cancer in men, doing BP & Blood Sugar measurements, sourcing support to offer free/at source Vaccinations Against Cancers, & providing a patient navigation system to enable follow up of screen positive patients through diagnosis, treatment and support care.

Since our inception, BWS has touched the lives of more than 500,000 women, men and youths across Nigeria in real terms- through, crowd mobilization, one-on-one contact, extensive distribution of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials, a variety of Social Media engagements/Workshops/Live Talk Shows, GO PINK DAY TRIVIA, PINKY FITNESS FIESTA, 'Meet & Greet', workshops and health talks, training of Youth corp members in 28 States, Training of '500 Women Advocacy Army', re-training of Healthcare providers from 31 States, training medical students from 13 of the 32 medical schools in the country, instigated various cancer and other non-communicable diseases awareness initiatives across Nigeria, including, THE 'INTERNATIONAL CANCER WEEK IN NIGERIA' (ICW... currently, an annual event in Nigeria).

BWS also advocates to policy makers and diaspora organizations, for the provision of medical services and skill transfer/research/Clinical Trials, to assist tertiary and secondary health care providers, to create sustainable cancer care resources [Both Human & Infrastructural]. BWS achieved these, by; establishing cancer control collaborations with different UK/American research centres and medical teams, championing successful advocacy to policy makers and opinion moulders.

BWS has many ongoing initiatives and projects, all year round, in its bid to achieve its mission.

We are driven by our Core Values; Passionate, Accessible, Teamwork and collaboration, Client satisfaction.

WHAT IS CANCER AND WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are many kinds of cancer, but they all start because of out-of-control growth of abnormal cells. Cancer comes in many shapes and sizes, and how they affect the body varies greatly. Cancer is a term used to describe a group of illnesses all having certain common characteristics – in which cells of an

organ or tissue in the body become abnormal, growing and multiplying out of control. There are over 200 different types of cancer, able to form in any part of the body from head to toe, each with a specific name, treatment and chance of being cured.

How do Cancers Form & how do they differ from normal cells?

Normal cells generally divide about 50 times, and reproduce themselves throughout the body in an orderly and controlled manner to replace worn out tissue, to heal wounds, and to maintain healthy organs, they then get old and either they die

Or they sit there and do nothing – thus they are mortal. Cancer begins when cells in a part of the body start to grow out of control. Cancer cells, unlike normal cells, will continue to divide and live unless purposefully killed, - we call this immortality. Cancer cells don't follow any rules, they are anarchist, so not only do cancer cells have unlimited growth potential, but they also stop communicating with each other and with the normal cells that surround them.

Some tumours grow and enlarge only at the site where they begin and these are referred to as benign tumours. Others not only enlarge locally but also have the potential to invade and destroy surrounding normal tissue and to spread to distant parts of the body, & then begin to grow in those other parts of the body, like the bones, brain, liver, and blood. They achieve this through eating through the boundaries of the organ where they started and

either burst through the blood vessels or through Lymphatic channels to other organs – a process known as “metastasis”. These are called malignant tumours or cancers.

Recent studies have shown that cancers, such as that of the prostate and breast, can begin to develop anywhere from 10 to 40 years, before they are detected.

NOTE:

Cancer is NOT caused by witchcraft or any form of supernatural force. Cancer is a disease that can affect anyone, anywhere, in any country, at anytime. Cancer is a complex group of diseases with many possible causes.

Some of the known causes/habits/lifestyles that predispose/increase chances of cancer* include:

Genetic factors

Lifestyle factors [such as tobacco use, Alcohol, poor diet, physical inactivity; obesity.

Certain types of infections. [Some viruses are linked to certain cancers. E.g. those with persistent infection with the Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C virus have an increased risk of developing cancer of the liver, and persistent infection with the *Human Papillomavirus (HPV) causes Cervical, Oro-Pharyngeal, Anal & Penile Cancers*].

Environmental: [exposures to different types of chemicals, fumes (e.g. putrefied waste due to inadequate refuse disposal, vehicular fumes etcetera) and radiation]

Age: [The older you are, the more likely that you will develop a cancer. This is probably due to a build-up of damage to cells in the body, over time. Also, the body's defenses and resistance against abnormal cells, may become weaker as you get older].

Immune System: [Those with a compromised immune system have an increased risk of developing certain cancers. E.g. people with HIV/AIDS, or people on immunosuppressive treatment]

What lifestyle choices can I make to help me fight Cancer?

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Get regular physical activity exercise.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Get 10-15 minutes of sunshine a day.
- Eat, live in moderation.
- Reduce stress.
- Take in plenty of fresh air. Get help to stop smoking if you are a smoker.
- Allow yourself 8 hours of sleep at night for optimum rest.
- Trust – trusting in a higher power helps reduce stress.
- Alcohol abuse

Balanced diet:

- Eat a healthy diet, with a variety of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Eat more of vegetables, especially leafy green vegetables (in as raw a form as possible, not over cooked), eat your fruits before or in-between meals, & not immediately after meals.
- Eat in moderation (2/3rd vegetable, and the balance made up of your carbohydrate & protein)
- Eat food as close as possible to its natural form (Vegetables raw or steamed, not overcooked in water)
- Limit your intake of processed foods, foods laden with preservatives, & sugar/sweeteners/enhancers limit or eliminate your intake of alcohol [1 drink per day for women, 2 per day for men].
- Eat more vegetables, lentils (beans-type foods – akidi, okpa, fio-fio), & our natural complex carbohydrates (sweet potatoes, cocoyam, yam, cassava, local rice)
- Boil or Grill your foods, rather than fry or smoke them (if you must fry – pan-fry in shallow oil)
- Use very little oil for cooking & avoid re-using oil, or using oil that is in a 'solid state' when it is at room temperature & animal fat. Olive Oil, flaxseed oil, Coconut oil, well processed palm-oil are recommended.
- Drink lots of water – for you are 80% water. Best to drink water an hour before or an hour after food (not with food) and just before you go to bed and immediately after you get up from bed. (Aim to drink not less than 2-4 litres of water daily as a load)
- Exercise at least 3 to 4 times a week, sustaining your body in motion for at least 30 minutes each time.
- Eat less salt, & energy dense, nutrient poor, sugar laden, refined foods- especially carbohydrates, & foods with preservatives.

- Avoid food enhancers containing MSG(Monosodium glutamate) and also sweeteners with aspartame, etc. Season your food with a lot natural ingredients; herbs, Onions, garlic, ginger, etc.

What are some signs and symptoms of Cancer?

These are some of the general signs and symptoms of cancer. But, *remember, having any of these, does not mean that you have cancer*, as —many other things cause these signs and symptoms, too.

If you have any of these symptoms see a doctor and if they last for a long time or get worse, please urgently see a doctor:

- Unexplained weight loss ·Prolonged fever
- Fatigue
- Prolonged, unexplained pain
- Any new skin change, either darker or lighter dis- colouration
- Change in bowel habits or bladder function
- Sores that do not heal
- White patches inside the mouth or white spots on the tongue
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge
- Thickening or lump in the breast or other parts of the body
- Indigestion or trouble swallowing ·Recent change in a wart or mole – skin tags

How is Cancer diagnosed?

If a cancer is suspected from your symptoms:

Your doctor will examine you to look for abnormalities such as a lump under the skin or an enlarged liver. You may be referred for tests such as Radiological tests (X-rays, CT, MRI, US, Nuclear Scan, etc) , blood tests, endoscopy, colonoscopy, bronchoscopy, etc, depending on where the suspected cancer is situated.

These tests can often find the exact site of a suspected cancer.

However, a biopsy (when a small sample of tissue is removed from a part of the body is taken & then examined under the microscope to look for abnormal cells), is often needed to be certain that the abnormality is a cancer and not something else (such as a benign

What are the treatment options for Cancer?

Treatment options vary, depending on the type of cancer and how far it has grown or spread (referred to as Stage of the cancer).

The three most common treatments are:

Surgery: It may be possible to operate and remove malignant tumours.

Chemotherapy: This is a treatment that uses anti-cancer drugs to kill cancer cells, or to stop them from multiplying. There are various different types of drugs used for chemotherapy. The drug or combination of drugs selected depends on the type of cancer being treated.

Radiotherapy: This is a treatment that uses high energy beams of radiation which are focused on cancerous tissue. This kills cancer cells, or stops cancer cells from multiplying.

Bone marrow transplant: High dose chemotherapy may damage bone marrow cells and lead to blood problems. However, if you receive healthy bone marrow after the chemotherapy then this helps to overcome this problem. Bone Marrow/Cord blood transplant are also used for blood cancers

Hormone therapy: This is where drugs are used to block the effects of hormones that sustain the cancer. This treatment may be used for cancers that are “hormone sensitive” such as some cancers of the breast, prostate and uterus.

Gene therapy is a new area of possible treatments. Research has found and some are still on-going /underway on ways of blocking, repairing or replacing abnormal genes in cancer cells.

Special techniques can sometimes be used to cut off the blood supply to tumours, The tumour then dies. (Minimal Invasive surgical radiology- guided procedures

Targeted Therapies

For some cancers, a combination of two or more treatments may be used. A range of other treatments may also be used to ease cancer related symptoms such as pain.(Palliative Care)

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