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Myanmar's Renewed Focus on National Cancer Care and Control Services



One of the patients at the U Hla Tun Hospice Cancer Foundation in Yangon, who has survived cancer with the long-term help and support of the Foundation. (Photo: N Enwerem-Bromson/IAEA)

“We need to establish multi-disciplinary tumour boards in relevant hospitals to improve cancer management”

— Dr Win Myint, Deputy Minister of Health

At the end of 2015, Myanmar received the first UN inter-agency expert team of cancer specialists coordinated by the IAEA's Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) in coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional and Country Offices and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The team visited a broad range of health care institutions in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay, from primary to tertiary levels of care, including private hospitals, and met with representatives from the Government, academia and non-Governmental Organisations.

According to IARC¹, Myanmar faced an estimated 64 000 new cancer cases in 2012 and this figure has been on the rise. Cancer deaths are predicted to increase by over two thirds by 2030. While some cancer care services, such as surgery and radiotherapy, are generally free to the public at the three main cancer hospitals, ensuring affordability and access for the majority of the rural population remains a major challenge.

The Director of the IAEA's Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT), Ms Nelly Enwerem-Bromson, who led the mission, underlined that, “the intensified collaboration between the Government of Myanmar and PACT provides an excellent opportunity to enhance comprehensive cancer control services and at the same time to strengthen the national health system. These two goals are fully complementary. It is furthermore essential to look at how these services can be offered in a way that supports equitable and affordable access for all people of Myanmar.”

¹ <http://globocan.iarc.fr/Default.aspx>



In the view of the WHO representative, Dr Jorge Luna, the conduct of the imPACT review mission was very timely given that the Government is planning to develop a national universal health coverage plan and the strong interest in reducing the cancer burden in the country.

Dr Khin Cho Win, Head of the Radiotherapy Department at the Yangon General Hospital expressed his concern about the [Hospital's] difficulties in coping with the increasing public demand for our services. "We have too few facilities and insufficient numbers of trained staff to cope with the growing number of cases that we see."

development of a national cancer registration system to enable informed decision-making for cancer control policies and related investments.

Link to related resources:



Dr Arthur Sun Myint (second from the left), expert in radiation oncology, discusses radiation safety and treatment practices at the Brachytherapy Control Room of the Radiotherapy department at the Yangon General Hospital. (Photo: A Juric/IAEA)

The Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Win Myint stated that the country's greatest needs relate to strengthen the health workforce, specifically in terms of increasing staff and upgrading skills. "We need to establish multi-disciplinary tumour boards in relevant hospitals to improve cancer management."

Through national technical cooperation projects, the IAEA assists Myanmar in enhancing its human resource capacities in medical imaging techniques, radiotherapy treatment services, nuclear medicine, and in improving the accuracy of dosimetry services to foster the safe use of radiation technology throughout 2016 and 2017.

In January 2016, the Ministry of Health organized a national seminar on cancer control to advance the discussion on comprehensive cancer control priorities in light of the preliminary imPACT conclusions and recommendations. Concurrently, IARC launched a support project for the

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