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Vietnam Needs International Help to Develop a National Plan to Fight Cancer

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—Lai Duc Truong, WHO country representative

VietNam News: The Vietnam Government meets just 10 per cent of demand for cancer prevention and needs international help to develop a national plan to curb the disease, reports Deputy Health Minister Nguyen Thi Xuyen. The limited cover was despite the priority given to cancer prevention, she told International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) representatives in Ha Noi on Tuesday. The number of cancer patients was increasing with about 150,000 new sufferers found each year, she said. The number of yearly deaths from the disease was 75,000.

A cancer prevention network established in six regions, including Ha Noi, HCM City, Hue and Can Tho, was expected to be expanded in the near future. National Cancer Hospital director Nguyen Ba Duc recalled that an IAEA team had visited Vietnam from October 30 to November 2 last year as part of its Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT). The team's mission was to assess Vietnam's cancer-prevention capacities and make recommendations for strengthening the

national system. The investigators had found that a shortage of radiotherapy treatment facilities and trained staff was hampering efforts to treat cancer victims. The team also found that an inadequate registration system was preventing health workers from properly assessing national planning and that a more comprehensive, integrated national plan for cancer prevention was required.

IAEA representative Elio Omobono said major investment in prevention and early detection of cancer was critical because about 80 per cent of patients were incurable at diagnosis. Vietnam needed to prepare and begin implementation of a priority-driven strategic national cancer control plan and establish a national steering committee to do so, he said.

World Health Organization (WHO) representative Lai Duc Truong said his organisation was willing to co-ordinate with the IAEA to help Vietnam prevent cancer. The WHO representative argued that any national cancer-prevention programme needed to be mixed with similar programmes for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) caused by tobacco, alcohol and poor nutrition. "It's necessary to build a system for monitoring and managing sufferers of NCDs," he said. "The country's programme needs to focus on prevention so as to quickly identify disease and establish a national network for the prevention of NCDs."

Vietnam Atomic Energy Commission director Vuong Huu Tan said the country needed to focus on staff training and to build a nuclear reactor with sufficient capacity to produce radioactive isotopes for health programmes. The two existing reactors producing radioactive isotopes meets only 30 per cent of demand, he said. Vietnam's



Programme of
Action for
Cancer
Therapy
PACT

national strategy for cancer prevention 2006-10 was approved on July 17, this year. It is intended to reduce the incidence of tobacco-related cancers identified in 2000 by 30 per cent. It is also designed to ensure that 100 per cent of infants are vaccinated against Hepatitis B; reduce the mortality rate of breast, mouth and rectal cancer and decrease the proportion of advanced cancer from 80 to 50 per cent.

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