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09 ADOPTING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CAN PREVENT CANCER

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It is estimated that almost a third of all cancer cases could have been prevented by adopting a healthy lifestyle and improving environmental conditions. For this reason, it is crucial to promote awareness and prevention, including various types of communicable diseases and chronic ailments to ensure the well-being of the public.

This was stated by a Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) specialist in pathology, Professor Dr. Hasnan Jaafar in his recent Professorial Inaugural Lecture at the USM Health Campus in Kelantan titled "Our Role in Understanding Cancer and its Prevention."

According to Hasnan, among the important steps that can be observed to prevent the risk of cancer is to avoid tobacco in any form, maintain a healthy weight and active physical lifestyle by engaging in exercise for just thirty minutes or five times in a week.

"People should also increase their intake of fruits and vegetables while reducing consumption of red meat, abstain from alcohol or foods containing alcohol, protect themselves from over exposure to the sun's rays and perform regular cancer screening tests," he continued.

The lack of comprehension of cancer often gives rise to anxiety and fear among patients who are newly diagnosed with the disease. This can however be alleviated if one understands the causes of the disease and how to tackle it.

According to Hasnan, available statistics reveal that the number of cancer sufferers has shown a yearly increase worldwide where over 13 million patients have been diagnosed with various kinds of cancer, of which more than 8 million have resulted in fatality especially among people from poor and developing nations which do not possess sufficient medical support to treat the disease.

"The costs of treating cancer in addition are prohibitive, as such one of the main approaches that we need to take is to try and prevent its occurrence in the first place – as emphasised in the 2014 Cancer Report launched by the International Agency for Cancer Research of the World Health Organisation (IACR WHO) in conjunction with World Cancer Day," he added.

The report shows that cancer is on the rise at a truly worrying rate worldwide and preventive strategies need to be implemented effectively to halt the rise in the occurrence of the disease.

There are more than 100 types of cancer, which can occur to almost anyone, and the rate of it occurring increases with age.

"Cancer has been closely-linked to an individual's lifestyle and in Malaysia, it occurs in tandem with the increase in cases of heart and metabolic diseases, which are related to unhealthy lifestyles, as reflected in the statistics from the Malaysian Health Ministry (KKM) showing that cancer was the number four cause of death at the hospitals in 2011," he added.

Hasnan cited the statistics from KKM, stating that in 2011, lung cancer became the main cause of cancer-related deaths at the KKM Hospitals, followed by breast cancer and colorectal cancer.

"Having a better understanding of the cause of cancer and its biological behaviour can help us keep this malady in check and reduce the risks of facing it; in fact cancer can even be avoided and the risks reduced in many instances by adopting a healthy lifestyle, and it is essential that all parties concerned cooperate in their efforts towards the promotion of cancer prevention in the country," said Hasnan, who came from the second batch of USM Medical Sciences graduates (1987).

Hailing from the town of Rantau Panjang in Selama, Perak, he began his service with USM in 1996 after completing his Master's studies in Pathology from the University of Malaya, with his research focusing on cancer pathology especially breast cancer, brain cancer and musculoskeletal cancer as well as being actively involved in stem cell research especially on neural stem cells. - Translation: Dr. Nurul Farhana Low Abdullah & Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin/Text: Mohamad Abdullah



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Pusat Media dan Perhubungan Awam / Media and Public Relations Centre

Level 1, Building E42, Chancellory II, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Pulau Pinang Malaysia

Tel : +604-653 3888 | Fax : +604-658 9666 | Email : pro@usm.my (<mailto:pro@usm.my>)

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