



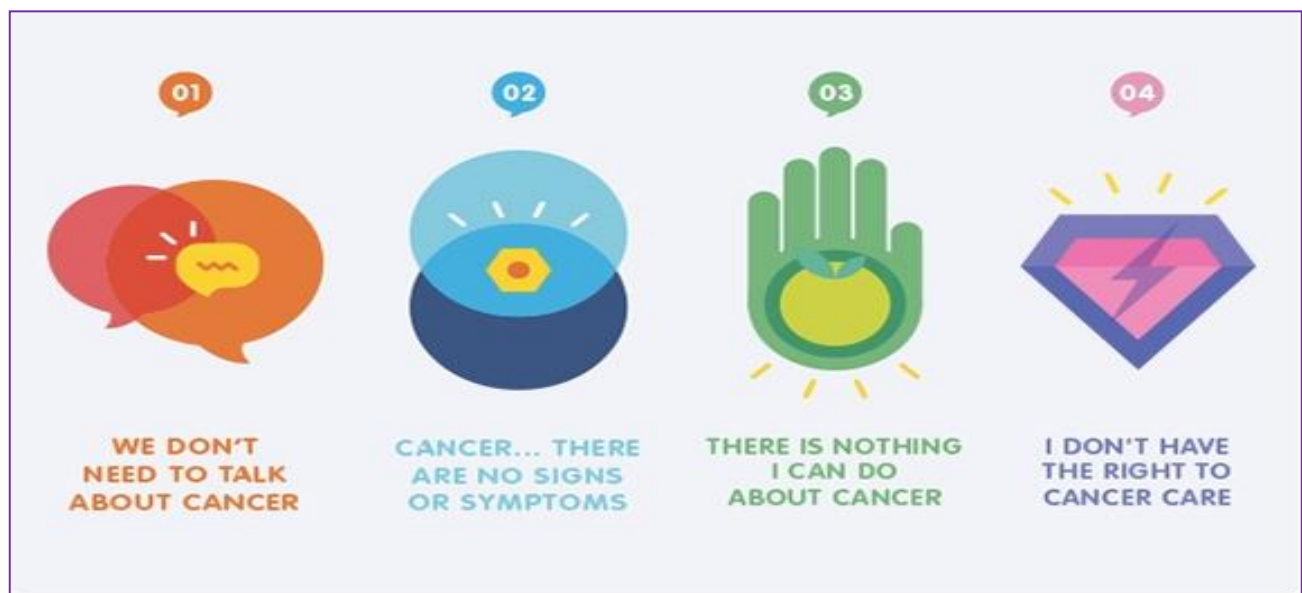
WORLD CANCER DAY 2014

“Debunk the myths”

The Cancer Association of Zimbabwe (Cancer Centre) joins the international community in commemorating World Cancer Day, which is commemorated on the **4th of February** every year. The international theme for this year is **“Debunk the myths”**. To suit Zimbabwean needs, the day is being commemorated under the theme **“Busting cancer myths and misconceptions”**

Myths and misconceptions increase stigma and reduces chances of cancer patients seeking treatment early. This results in lost opportunities to prevent cancer and successfully treating the disease.

Cancer Myths being debunked at international level are:



Picture adapted from Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) website

The following are some of the common myths and misconceptions about cancer in Zimbabwe;

MYTH 01

Cancer is one disease – False

Truth: Cancer is one word that represents not one, but more than 200 different types of diseases. It is a group of diseases with common feature of abnormal growth of body cells. Cells are the basic unit of life, the building blocks of body organs and tissue. Under normal circumstances cells divide and multiply in a controlled orderly manner for growth, to repair worn out and injured tissues as the body needs them to keep healthy. When cells become old or damaged, they die and are replaced with new cells. However, sometimes this orderly process goes wrong. When this happens, cells do not die when they should and they continue to multiply without control forming a mass or tumour. These growths are considered either benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). Cancer is always named after the part of the body where it starts, even if it spreads to other body parts later.

MYTH 02

We don't need to talk about cancer – False

Truth: Cancer can sometimes be a difficult topic to talk about particularly in some cultures and settings, dealing with the disease openly can improve outcomes at an individual, community and policy level. Talking about cancer can

help to challenge negative beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that lead to myths, cause fear and stigma, and prevent people from seeking early detection and treatment. It is lack of knowledge on cancer that when many people hear the word 'cancer' they get scared, some hide it and some use traditional medicines until it becomes too late for treatment. Talking about cancer openly also reduces stress and anxiety, thus improving treatment outcomes. Governments, communities, employers and media all have a role to play to challenge perceptions about cancer to create a culture where people are empowered to access quality cancer prevention and care.

MYTH 03

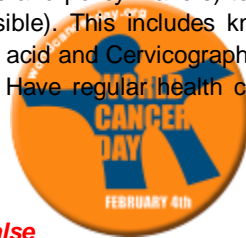
There are NO signs and symptoms of cancer – False

Truth: For many cancers, there are warning signs and symptoms. Although early signs and symptoms are not known for all cancers, many cancers, including breast, cervical, skin, oral and colorectal cancers, and some childhood cancers, have known early signs and symptoms and the benefits of early detection cannot be disputed. The following are the most common general signs and symptoms of cancers;

- i. Unusual vaginal discharge not responding to treatment or unexplained vaginal bleeding
- ii. A sore that does not heal
- iii. Change in bowel or bladder habits (in passing urine, unexplained constipation or diarrhea)
- iv. Ingestion or difficulty in swallowing
- v. Nagging cough or hoarseness of voice
- vi. Thickening or lump in the breast or elsewhere on the body
- vii. Skin changes (including obvious change in wart or mole)
- viii. A white spot in the eye especially in children

If you notice any of the above signs and symptoms consult your nearest health provider

Many cancers can be treated and even be cured if they are detected early enough. It is thus important for everyone (individuals, communities, health professionals and policy makers) to be aware of, and educated in recognizing the signs and symptoms for cancer (where possible). This includes knowledge on available screening services and methods such as Visual inspection with acetic acid and Cervicography (VIAC), Prostate specific antigen tests (PSA), Breast self-examinations and mammograms. Have regular health check-ups by your health care service provider (doctor or nurse), this leads to early detection



MYTH 04

There is nothing I can do about cancer – False

Truth: About a third of the most common cancers can actually be prevented. A healthy lifestyle can reduce the chances of developing cancer details of prevented are dealt with in myths 5. HPV and Hepatitis B can also be prevented by vaccination of children during the first year of life.

It is also estimated that about a third of all cancers are curable. Chances of cure depend on the type of cancer, stage of cancer and the individual. Effective and well administered treatment is known to improve the quality of life of cancer patients or even cure the disease. It is estimated that 40% of cancer patients reach or exceed the five year survivor mark. The common treatment procedures for cancer in Zimbabwe are surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Chances of cure depend on the type of cancer, stage of cancer at detection and other individual factors. Improved education and access to preventative care is bringing improved cancer outcomes to patients. Screening helps detect cancer at early stages when it is most likely to be cured.

Cancer pain can be relieved. The science and art of pain management is referred to as palliative care. Palliative care encompasses the whole self-caring for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of patients and their families. Palliative care is not for the terminally ill only. It usually involves the use of different pain killers; from mild pain killers such as paracetamol to strong pain killers such as morphine (controlled or medical use of morphine improves the quality of life of cancer patients). It may also involve the alleviation of symptoms, the side effects of curative treatments, such as relieving nausea associated with chemotherapy.

Have regular check-ups by your health service provider

MYTH 05

Cancer spreads from person to person – False

Truth: No type of cancer is infectious (cannot spread from one person to the other). Cancer is a group of diseases characterized with the development of abnormal cells that divide uncontrollably and have the ability to infiltrate and destroy normal body tissue. There are a number of factors which are known to increase the risk of developing cancer.

These include tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, chronic infections, overweight / obesity and exposure to cancer causing agents in your environment, including the workplace. Although cancer itself is not infectious, some chronic infections also increase risk of developing the disease. For instance, human papilloma virus (HPV) is a known risk factor for cervical cancer and Hepatitis C is a known risk factor for liver cancer. HIV and AIDS also increase the risk of developing cancer by weakening the immune system.

MYTH 06

If I receive radiotherapy or chemotherapy it will kill me – False

Truth: Effective and well administered treatment is known to improve the quality of life of cancer patients or even cure the disease. Precautions and due care is taken in cancer treatment delivery. This is accompanied by careful monitoring of patients throughout the treatments course. Early detection and prompt treatment is central to the success of the radiotherapy and or chemotherapy. The biggest challenge is that the majority of cancer patients (about 80%) in Zimbabwe present for treatment when it is too late (3rd and 4th stage) for treatment to be effective. This results in increased premature deaths from cancer. Diagnosis of cancer at earlier stages of disease can enhance chances of successful treatment outcomes and greatly increases chances of a successful cure.

MYTH 07

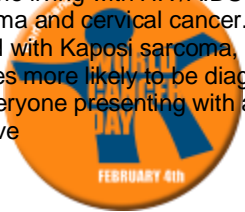
If your close relative(s) had cancer, you will have it too– False

Truth: While it is true that some cancers are genetic, this does not mean that one will definitely develop cancer because of their heredity. Cancers such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer and colorectal cancer are a few of the cancers that can be passed down genetically. If a parent has these cancers, the cancer gene may be passed to their child. If a child inherits the gene, it only raises the likelihood of developing cancer, not guaranteeing a cancer sentence. Regular screening for the respective cancer(s) is very important in these groups of people

MYTH 08

Certain cancers only develop in people who are HIV positive – False

Truth: The connection between HIV/AIDS and certain cancers is not completely understood, but the link likely depends on a weakened immune system. People living with HIV/AIDS have a high risk of developing certain cancers, such as Kaposi sarcoma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma and cervical cancer. Studies have shown that people infected with HIV are 1000 times more likely to be diagnosed with Kaposi sarcoma, at least 70 times more likely to be diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and at least 5 times more likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer compared to people who are HIV negative. However, not everyone presenting with any of these cancers is HIV positive, as they can also develop in people who are HIV negative



Zimbabwe's 2014 WCD commemoration is going to be held on the 28 of February 2014 in the city of Kadoma. The WCD commemoration is being coordinated by the Department of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Ministry of Health and Child Care. It is interesting to note that this is the first time the WCD commemorations venue is decentralised to small town (Kadoma City). Let us all contribute towards the success of this crucial event not only on Zimbabwe's but also on the World's health agenda.

For More Information Contact

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"We are committed to cancer prevention and improving the quality of life of patients, their families and communities through timely and evidence based interventions"