



WORLD HEALTH DAY 2015 “Food Safety”

The Cancer Association of Zimbabwe (Cancer Centre) joins the international community in commemorating World Health Day, which is commemorated on the 7th of April every year. This year's theme is “Food Safety” and as a result the Cancer Association of Zimbabwe found it necessary to share with the readers the relationship between food safety and some cancers.

Food safety is a complex health concept that involve the food producers (farmers), manufactures, vendors and the consumers. According to the World Health Organization, we should keep food clean, separate raw and cooked food, cook food thoroughly, keep food at safe temperatures and use safe water and raw materials when preparing food as a way of making sure that the food we eat is safe. Globally, unsafe food is responsible for an estimated 2 million deaths of people annually. Food can contain harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemical substances that can cause hundreds of diseases including cancer. It is therefore, everyone's responsibility to make sure that the food consumed on daily is safe. This is not an easy task especially bearing in mind that most of the food stuffs in Zimbabwe are being imported. The green revolution, industrialization and lack of enforcement of the environmental laws result in the contamination of not only water bodies but also arable land from which humanity derive its livelihood.

Some of the dangerous food contamination non-biodegradable chemicals that are highly linked to some cancers are as follows:

Arsenic: Usually used in industries as an alloying agent, processing of glass, pigments, paper, textiles, metal adhesives, wood preservatives and ammunition. Long term exposure to inorganic arsenic through drinking contaminated water or even eating food irrigated with arsenic rich water can lead to skin cancers, neurotoxicity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Asbestos: All forms of asbestos are carcinogenic (cancer causing). Asbestos is responsible for most cancer of the lung, larynx and ovaries. Asbestos exposure can also cause asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs). Currently, about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at the workplace.

Dioxins: These are environmental pollutants known as persistent organic pollutants. They are mainly by-products of industrial process such as smelting, chlorine bleaching of paper pulp, and the manufacturing of herbicides and insecticides. Uncontrolled waste incinerators (solid waste and hospital waste) contribute significantly to polluting the environment. Dioxins are highly toxins and can cause cancer and other reproductive and developmental problems. They can also interfere with the immune system.

There are many non-biodegradable substances that are discharged into the environment. These substances together with some naturally occurring toxins end up in the food chain and ultimately consumed by people. Food safety laws therefore, need to be enforced and the consumers need to be made aware of the dangers posed by consuming food from unregulated sources. Proper food handling and preparation can significantly improve the safety food, however it cannot eliminate the some of the dangerous toxins absorbed from the contaminated ecosystems. It is therefore, imperative to adopt a multisectoral approach to food safety.

We therefore, take this momentous opportunity to urge government and its partners, members of the public and other stakeholders alike, to step up efforts towards promoting comprehensive “Food Safety” as a way of promoting public health. Remember that, Promoting healthy lifestyles/public health and preventing cancer is cheaper than managing increasing disease burden not only to individuals but also to the nation at large.

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OUR VISION: *Universal access to cancer information and comprehensive cancer management services*

“We are committed to cancer prevention and improving the quality of life of patients, their families and communities through timeous, cost effective and evidence based interventions” – Together We Can!