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## ARTICLE

### Cancer awareness

Cancer awareness is the key to early detection and better health-seeking behaviour. Cancer is quite common in both developing as well as developed countries, but awareness is yet poor among the general population. Poor awareness may lead to poor uptake of screening modalities and delay in diagnosis. One factor that has been consistently shown to be associated with late diagnosis and treatment is a delay in seeking help for cancer-like symptoms. This paper reviews the literature on cancer awareness among the general population and attitude towards screening modalities. The poor awareness level among the Indian population shows the need for health education and sensitisation regarding cancer and its different aspects. This will be helpful in the successful implementation of health programmes related to cancer.

Cancer is a global disease and is spreading rapidly. Healthcare systems across the world are facing stiff challenges to tackle this issue. This appears formidable when India's 1.3 billion population, which is considered to, spread across 29 states and 7 union territories with varying degree of population genetics, environment, lifestyle, etc. lead to a heterogeneous distribution of disease burden. In low- and middle-income countries, patients with cancer generally have a poorer prognosis compared with patients in high-income countries; the reasons being lack of awareness, late diagnosis and inequitable access to affordable curative services. Lack of awareness contributes to the late reporting of cancer cases to the healthcare facility. Data from four major centres in India showed that the majority of individuals with cancer seek healthcare for the first time at late stages. The importance of cancer awareness has been emphasised as a means of ensuring behaviour that facilitates early detection, whereas the absence of cancer awareness has been seen as a detriment to this end. Delay in health-seeking is also attributed to factors such as illiteracy, financial constraints, as well as myths and superstitions along with lack of awareness and these go hand-in-hand, most of the time.

Screening is an important preventive measure in cancer control. Even though the national programme in India has a screening component, it is yet to take root in most part of the country. At present, most of the screening tests are available at higher centres only. The available screening methods to the population are also not adequately utilised. Efforts should be made to

learn why such gaps occur in service delivery and utilisation, and for that, it is pertinent to understand the attitude of people towards screening practices.

With the increasing trend of cancer in India, the awareness level is expected to change, so is the attitude towards cancer screening. Studies on cancer awareness and attitude towards screening in India are limited. Awareness about cancers and cancer screening procedures will help in early diagnosis and subsequent treatment and a better outcome. Thus, the authors have tried to collate information related to cancer awareness and attitude towards screening methods to get an overall view of the situation. With rolling out of the screening services in the country, there is the need to synthesise a review on cancer awareness. Such information would aid in making systematic changes in the programme if required to improve uptake of the screening programme and overall awareness related to cancer in the population.