

Early diagnosis can help cure most childhood cancers

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Onco.com has served more than 250 child cancer patients till now



Bengaluru based Onco.com, the world's first online cancer care platform, has announced it is now providing free cancer consultations for all children below the age of 14 who are suffering from cancer. Said **Rashie Jain, Co-founder & CEO, Onco.com**: "Not many people relate cancer to young kids, but the reality is that childhood cancers account for 3-5% of all cancer cases in India. The country hosts a fifth of all childhood cancer patients in the world. As many as 50,000 children get affected by cancer every year in the country, a number growing by 1.5% annually. We believe that no child should ever die of cancer, especially when it can be treated with a high degree of success. We at Onco.com have decided to provide free cancer consultations for all children below the age of 14 years."

Onco.com has served more than 250 child cancer patients till now and gets 5-8 requests for treatment guidance every month for child patients. The Incidence of childhood cancer in India ranges between 80 to 260 per million population. More boys get afflicted with cancer than girls. The commonest cancers in children are related to blood and brain. In boys, the commonest cancers are leukemia and lymphoma, while for girls, these are leukemia and brain tumors. The commonest symptoms of blood cancers are frequent fever, loss of weight, generalized weakness, paleness of skin and loss of appetite.

Dr. Amit Jotwani, Co-founder of Onco.com and Chief of Medical Services who himself is a seasoned oncologist said: "Childhood cancers have better chances of cure as they are more responsive to treatment. In developed nations, the cure rate for childhood cancer is 80%. This plunges to just 40% in developing nations like India. The results also vary within the country, with metro cities and states with better healthcare facilities having much better cure rates. The incidence of childhood cancers in India is quite low compared to the total number of adult patients. Because of this, the infrastructure for treatment of childhood cancer patients is lacking in the country, even though they require more intensive care and monitoring than adult patients. There are not enough centers providing specialized treatment of childhood cancers. This adversely affects the quality of childhood cancer care, eventually leading to poorer cure rates."

Talking about the survival rates of patients, **Dr. Amit Jotwani** said: “There is not enough mortality data for childhood cancers in India. However, there are three major causes of death in children with cancer: delayed diagnosis at advanced stage; lack of adequate treatment facilities; and lack of proper care during treatment. Less than 30% childhood cancers in India get diagnosed in time, which adversely affects the young patient’s chances for a cure.”

Pointing out the various myths and challenges regarding child cancer, **Rashie Jain, Cofounder & CEO, Onco.com**, said: “The most common myth is that cancer doesn't affect children and it is a disease of old age. This leads to a delay in diagnosis, which makes it difficult to achieve cure. People need to be educated that cancer can affect anyone, from a new born to an elderly person. Even when a child is diagnosed with cancer, many parents think that cancer cannot be cured and do not make enough effort at treatment. Little do they realize that childhood cancers actually have much higher chances of cure than adulthood cancers.”

She added: “As a society, we need to increase awareness about childhood cancers so that both parents and doctors do not miss this disease in its early stages. We also need to spread the message that childhood cancers are highly curable if treated in time. Government should set up well-equipped treatment centers for childhood cancers with facilities for advanced treatment, as well as provide research and training of specialists. Dedicated funds should be allocated for treatment of childhood cancers under government insurance schemes, as children require much more intensive care than adults.”

Talking about the role that online portals like Onco.com can play in improving outcomes, **Dr. Jotwani** recounted the case of a child suffering from Wilm's tumour, whose parents had approached the cancer care platform for advice. He said: “The child had been operated two weeks before and the parents were not sure regarding further treatment. Once they approached us, we formed a panel of senior oncologists for their opinion. The patient had not been advised further treatment and was asked to go home, as the surgeon who operated on the child earlier was not a childhood cancer specialist. Our panel recommended immediate radiation treatment followed by chemotherapy. We guided the parents to a childhood cancer specialist in a hospital equipped with cancer care for childhood patients. Wilm's tumour has more than 90% chances of cure. Had the child not undergone further treatment on our advice, he would have been deprived of cure from this disease.”