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TMC publishes study on oral cancer treatment cost in India

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The country has spent approximately Rs 2,386 crores in 2020 on oral cancer treatment



Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) has published a first-of-its-kind study on the cost of illness and treatment of oral cancer in India. A Tata Memorial Centre team, headed by Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, set out to conduct a cost of illness analysis that would provide invaluable information for policymakers that make appropriate allocation of resources towards cancer.

This is the first such study in India and among a handful globally, whose estimates were calculated, utilising a bottom-up approach where data was collected prospectively for each service as it was used.

This enormous data collection has resulted in determining the direct healthcare costs of treating oral cancer, that is, the per-patient cost borne by a healthcare provider that is directly attributable to treating oral cancer.

Dr Arjun Singh, Research Fellow at Tata Memorial Hospital and the lead author of the study said that the unit cost of treating advanced stages (Rs 2,02,892) was found to be 42 per cent greater than early stages (Rs 1,17,135).

At the same time, there was an average reduction of 11 per cent in the unit costs, as socioeconomic status increased. Medical equipment accounted for 97.8 per cent of capital costs, with the highest contributor being the radiology services that included CT, MRI and PET scan. Variable costs that included consumables for surgery in advanced stages were 1.4 times higher than in early stages. With the addition of additional chemo and radiotherapy to surgery, the average cost of treatment increased by 44.6 per cent.

About 60-80 per cent of the cases of oral cancer visit their specialist oncologists at advanced stages. Multiplying the cost per unit of early and advanced cancer as per the study's results, India spent approximately Rs. 2,386 crores in 2020 on oral cancer treatment, paid for by insurance schemes, government and private sector spending, out of pocket payments and charitable donations or a combination of these.

This is a significant portion of the healthcare budget allocation the government made in 2019-20, towards a single disease. Without any inflation in costs, this will result in an economic burden on the country of Rs 23,724 crores over the next ten years. This straining economic impact of treating oral cancer treatment, strongly suggests that prevention must be one of the key mitigation strategies for addressing affordability.