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17 January 2013 | News

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After the successful compilation of India's national cancer registry, the first-of-its-kind for any disease in the country over the last two decades, the government has embarked on an ambitious project to prepare a national registry for stroke in 2013.

The stroke registry program will be spearheaded by Bangalore-based National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research (NCDIR) which is a constituent unit of Delhi-based Indian Council for Medical Research. The National Cancer Registry work started in 1982 and eventually the program led to the formation of NCDIR. The institution has the mandate to prepare national registries for other diseases such as diabetes and coronary vascular disease. Stroke is the second disease tackled by NCDIR.

NCDIR's director-in-charge, Dr A Nandakumar, recently kicked off the program inviting all neurologists, radiologists, community and public health professionals and physicians treating stroke patients across the country to register their patients with the institution. Just like the cancer registry, initially the registry will seek to access data from at least top 20 locations in the country.

The registry will use information technology tools effectively to capture data about stroke patients from across the country. "The proposal envisages using electronic information technology in collecting information on stroke cases as and when they are reported," wrote Dr Nandakumar in his invitation letter to medical professionals.

Initially, the registry will be a national in coverage. Later, if the response is good, there will be compilation even population-based registries for various cities. This has been done in the case of cancer registry. The two-decade long cancer registry program, the forerunner of the exercise on stroke has been a great success in making available valuable data on cancer incidence and trends to help healthcare professional formulate their treatment plans.

According to a recent research paper writer by Dr Nandakumar along with Dr Ramnath Takiar and Dr Deenu Nadayil, based on the national cancer registry data collected since 1982, the number of cancer cases in India is projected to increase by 17 percent, from 979,786 patients in 2010 to 1.15 million by 2020. The data is derived from six of the 24 population-based cancer registries. The registries used for the study are from Bangalore, Barshi, Bhopal, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai. Data from the North East India cancer registry too has been used.

Some interesting trends have emerged from the cancer registry. The number of women cancer patients are 20 percent more than men. Tobacco-related cancer cases form the largest chunk in the country, which is about 20 percent of all cases. Cancers of the digestive tract is second in incidence, followed by head and neck cancers, blood-related cancers and gynecological related cancers. Breast cancer is one of the fastest growing segment and the number of cases are predicted to cross the 100,000 mark in the year 2020.

What is alarming is the realization that more than 80 percent of the cancers in India are in the advanced stages and palliative care and relief are essential to provide good quality life for these patients. The study has recommended preparation of an essential drug list and equip all public health centres with cancer chemotherapy and related services.