Cancer cases in India

Why in news?

A recent study warned that the number of people who have cancer expected to rise exponentially over the next two decades, with India as the cancer capital of the world.

What are the key findings of the study?

Key Findings
• **Non-communicable diseases -** The study found that Non Communicable Diseases comprised 63% of all deaths in India. • **Rise in numbers -** India recorded 13.9 lakh cancer cases in 2020 and the number is set to rise to 15.7 lakh by 2025, a 13% increase in 5 years. • **Vulnerable-** Those suffering cancer are also tend to skew younger. Around 30% of colon cancer patients in India are under the age of 50. • **New cases -** Around 10 lakh new cases of cancer are diagnosed in India each year. Of these, around 4% are children. • **Low screening -** Despite these facts and figures, cancer screening in India remains an afterthought. Just 1.9% of people are screened for breast cancer in India. • A mere 0.9% of people are screened for cervical cancer in India. That number is 73% in the US, 70% in the UK, and 43% in China.

What is cancer?

- Cancer is a disease where cells grow uncontrollably and spread to other parts of the body.
- **Common type of cancers -** Breast, cervix, and ovarian cancer are the most common forms of cancer affecting women and among men, they are lung cancer, mouth cancer, and prostate cancer.

  World Cancer Day is observed ever year on February 4. In India, November 7 is considered the National Cancer Awareness Day.

- **Leading site of cancers**-
  - Male- Lung cancer
  - Female- Breast cancer
  - Childhood (0-14 year)- Lymphoid leukaemia (boys- 29.2% and girls- 24.2%)

What are the factors contributing cancer?

- **Tobacco use** - Smoking and secondhand smoke exposure are the most significant risk factor for cancer.

- **Obesity -** Being overweight or obese increases the risk of 13 types of cancer.
- **Climate change** – Climate change with exposure to ultraviolet radiation, air pollution etc.,
- **Human papillomavirus (HPV) -** HPV causes almost all cervical cancers and several other types of cancer.
- **Other factors -** Advancing age, Unhealthy diets, Immunosuppression, Radiation and Genetic disorders.

At present, 1 in 3 Indians is pre-diabetic, 2 in 3 are pre-hypertensive, and 1 in 10 struggles with depression.

What are the challenges?

- **Shortage of facilities -** There is a shortage of pediatric oncology facilities in the country, particularly in government-run hospitals. Only 41% of public hospitals have dedicated pediatric oncology departments.
- **Lack of funds -** A lack of funds and access to care, as well as social stigma, are big hurdles for many affected families.
- **Infrastructure deficit -** Diagnosis, access to care and medications and follow-up are difficult and there is a lot of abandonment of treatment as the parents cannot afford treatment.
- **Low screening rates –** It poses a significant challenge for the fight against cancer, and stressed the importance of preventive health care measures.

Steps taken by government to mitigate cancer in India

• **National Cancer Control Program (NCCP) -** To reduce cancer deaths and cases, and improve the quality of life of cancer patients, launched in 1974.
• **Health Minister's Cancer Patient Fund (HMCPF) -** This fund provides up to Rs 2 Lakhs in assistance to patients living below the poverty line who are receiving cancer treatment at one of 27 Regional Cancer Centers (RCCs).
• **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) -** It set up NCD Clinics at the district and CHC levels to provide early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up services for common NCDs.
• **National Cancer Institute** - It is a state-of-the-art Tertiary Cancer care cum Research Institute constructed at the AIIMS Jhajjar campus.
• **Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital & Research Centre, Punjab**- It aims to provide world class cancer care to the residents of Punjab and neighboring states and union territories (UTs).
• **Centre for Integrative Oncology**- It has been established as a joint venture of All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) and National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR-ICMR) with the intention of collaborative research activities in cancer.
• **Koita Centre for Digital Oncology**- It has been established by the *National Cancer Grid (NCG)* to promote use of digital technologies and tools to improve cancer care across India.
• **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) -** Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy4 packages, along with surgical oncology are covered as part of cancer treatment in the empanelled hospitals under the scheme.
• **Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centers (AB-HWCs)-** Screening of 3 common cancers i.e. oral, breast and cervical, along with other common NCDs, is an integral part of service delivery under the AB-HWCs.
• **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)-** Significant focus on Oncology in its various aspects has been ensured in the new AIIMS that are being established under the program.
• **Strengthening of Tertiary Care for Cancer Scheme-** It is implemented by Central government to enhance the facilities for tertiary care of cancer.
• **CERVAVAC-** India has launched its first indigenously developed vaccine, “CERVAVAC” for the prevention of cervical cancer.
• **NexCAR19 CAR-T therapy**- It is India’s first indigenously Made-in-India CAR-T therapy which is the world’s most affordable CAR-T therapy and it puts India firmly on the global map of advanced cell and gene therapy.

What lies ahead?

- The government should incentivize screening as a first measure and support research activities for cancer detection and treatment.
- There is also a need for policies to impart financial protection and expand the screening and curative services for cancer.
- Government funds should be increased via schemes to access the health care effectively and awareness about the cancers should be wide spread to control the numbers in future.

References

1. Indian Express- Why are cancer cases soaring in India?

2. PIB- Strengthening cancer care in India

