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Cancer diagnoses on the rise globally, but so are successful recoveries

Four million people around the world die prematurely each year from disease

• By JUDY SIEGEL

There is good news and bad news about cancer in Israel and around the world, as the Union for International Cancer Control and the Israel Cancer Association mark the annual World Cancer Day on February 4.

While the number of diagnosed patients over the past five decades has risen fivefold around the world, the number of people who have recovered from malignant tumors has increased ninefold.

The UICC – based in Geneva and founded in 1933, with over 800 member organizations in 155 countries that fight cancer – aims to prevent millions of deaths each year by raising awareness of, and educating about, the disease and pressing governments and individuals across the world to take action.

At present, 8.2 million people around the world die from cancer in an average year; of them, four million die prematurely (aged 30 to 69 years). The world economic burden of cancer and other noncommunicable diseases will within the next two decades be stupendous – \$47 trillion – if action is not taken to prevent them, said the UICC.

This year, the UICC and the ICA put a special focus on genital cancer – relating to ovaries and testicles. While the prevalence of testicular can-

cer is rising, the death rates from it are declining here and abroad. This is due to the fact that the tumor is diagnosed at an early stage, as abnormal growths can easily be felt in the organ. In addition, even at more advanced stages, the ICA said, treatment is very effective.

As for ovarian cancer, the prevalence is declining here, but the death rates from this type of tumor are high because two-thirds of women are diagnosed at a late stage since the ovaries are deep in the abdomen, and there are often no symptoms until the tumor metastasizes.

In 2013, there were 169 new cases of testicular cancer here, 136 in Jewish men, 28 in Muslims and the rest Christians and those without a defined religion. Risk factors include undescended testes, a family history, being Caucasian, a young age, fertility problems and exposure in the uterus to DES (synthetic estrogen). The reason for the rise in cases around the world is not clear, but there may be genetic and environmental causes, the ICA said. “Just” four Jews and no Arabs died of it in that year.

As for ovarian cancer, in 2013, 361 new patients were diagnosed, 316 Jews, 31 Muslims and the rest others. Among the factors involved in the cancer are being older, obesity, hormonal factors and

others. In that year, 251 Jewish women, 13 Muslims and 12 others died of it.

There are known ways to fight these and other cancers: expanding programs for vaccination against cervical cancer and liver cancer (preventing hepatitis B and C); early diagnosis of breast, cervical and colon cancer; and raising taxes on tobacco and improved legislation and enforcement to prevent lung and other cancers.

In addition, the organizations aim at giving better palliative (pain relief) care to patients suffering from severe cancer.

They also aim at preventing cancer by reducing the consumption of red and processed meats, encouraging physical activity and reducing alcohol consumption, the ICA said. All of these can reduce death rates by more than half.

Regarding cancers of all types, in 2013, a total of 29,779 Israelis were diagnosed, while 25,531 had invasive cancers. Prostate cancer prevalence is highest among Jewish men, while lung cancer rates are highest among Arabs (who have high rates of smoking).

Breast cancer is the most common among Jewish and Arab women, representing a third of all cancers in this gender. In general, cancer is more common among Jews than Arabs.

In 2013, 10,698 cancer patients (9,317 of them Jews) died. Death rates are declining in Jewish men and women and Arab women, but remaining steady in Arab men (also due largely to smoking).

Cancer diagnoses and deaths among Israelis put this country in the top 20 in the world. Israeli men are in 19th place, while their female counterparts are in 15th place.

The ICA reported on published Chinese research that found a diet rich in cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy and others) reduces the risk of ovarian cancer by 7 percent to 13%. American researchers who examined the risk of cancer among people who spend most of their waking hours sitting found that chronically stationary people who did not exercise much or at all had a 43% higher risk of ovarian cancer, 10% higher risk of breast cancer and 65% more multiple myeloma (involving the white blood cells).

Wolfson Medical Center in Holon will hold special activities on Thursday between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. relating to cancer awareness. Members of the public are invited to undergo early diagnosis tests and to learn about prevention of cancer.

Director-general Dr. Yitzhak Berlovich said prevention and early diagnoses are the best ways to fight cancer.