

Giving back to the community

ORAL cancer, also known as mouth cancer, is the sixth most common cancer in the world. According to the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), approximately 6,800 people are diagnosed with mouth cancer in the UK every year. This equates to almost 2% of the total number of cancers diagnosed worldwide.

Oral cancer is a condition where a tumour begins to develop in the lining of the mouth. The tumour can be anywhere in the mouth, such as the surface of the tongue, inner cheeks, roof of the mouth, lips or gums.

NHS states that oral cancer commonly affects older adults in the age range of 50 to 74. Only an eighth of oral cancer cases involve people aged below 50. It is also more prevalent in men than women. This may be due to the higher alcohol consumption rate among men in general.

The symptoms of oral cancer may resemble ordinary mouth infections, which is why mouth infections should not be taken lightly. Common symptoms may include mouth ulcers that persist for several weeks, unexplained and persistent lumps in the mouth or neck, looseness of teeth or sockets that remain unhealed after extractions, persistent numbness or an odd feeling on the lip or tongue, changes in speech where none had been apparent such as lisps, and white or red patches on the lining of the mouth or tongue.

The type of oral cancer an individual has can be identified based on the type of cell where the cancer starts. Squamous cell carcinoma is the most common type of oral cancer and occurs in nine out of 10 cases. Other, less common types include adenocarcinoma, which develops in the salivary glands, sarcoma, which refers to abnormal growth in bones, cartilage, muscles and other tissues, oral malignant melanoma, a cancer that starts in



NUMed emphasises increasing the local community's awareness of oral cancer.

melanocytes, and lymphoma, a type of cancer that grows in the lymph glands and can sometimes develop in the mouth.

Treatments for oral cancer are broadly similar to treatments for other common cancers. These include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and targeted drug therapy. Oral surgery aims to completely remove the tumour from the mouth. Radiation therapies, such as external beam radiation therapy and brachytherapy, are carried out to treat cancerous tissues of the mouth through selected radiation technology.

Chemotherapy is another common technique and seeks to destroy cancer cells in the body using anticancer drugs. These are combined to attack cancer cells at

different stages of growth while decreasing the chances of drug resistance. Lastly, targeted drug therapy is a specific treatment that aims to interfere with cell growth on a molecular level. Under certain conditions, this treatment may be combined with chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Over time, a sizeable body of research has been accumulated to improve the treatments of oral cancer. Newcastle University, a world-class medical school in the UK renowned for its research excellence, has made remarkable contributions towards oral cancer research.

"Newcastle University is ranked among the top in the world for research. We are bringing that capability to our Newcastle University Medicine (NUMed) campus in



Dr Michaela Goodson.

Malaysia. One of the key focus areas is to encourage students to undertake research projects that not only help to enhance their knowledge, but also have a direct and positive impact on the local community," says Dr Michaela Goodson, dean of research at NUMed.

"A dedicated research laboratory is being opened on the campus, which will allow students and faculty members to undertake laboratory-based research projects on molecular mechanisms and determinants of disease in Malaysia," she adds.

Located in Johor, NUMed is the international campus of Newcastle University. With a solid foundation in research excellence, the university is dedicated to not only seeking advancements in oral cancer treatments but also promoting awareness of the disease among the local community.

■ For more information, call 07-555 3800, WhatsApp 011-1231 5411/012-784 9456, email admissions@newcastle.edu.my or visit www.ncl.ac.uk/numed/

"All Disease begins in the Gut"

- Hippocrates, The Father of Modern Medicine

In Malaysia, colorectal cancer is the second most common cancer in men and the third most common cancer in women.¹

Diets low in fiber, unbalanced gut bacteria, physical inactivity and chronic laxative use are common causes of poor gut health.²



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Sources:
¹ 3rd report of the National Cancer Registry, Ministry of Health, Malaysia.
² American Journal of Gastroenterology, 99:750-759, 2014.
³ British Journal of Nutrition (2015), 114:1638-1646.
⁴ MOH, Food (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2017
⁵ *B. lactis*, **BB-12** is an MOH-approved probiotic strain for food products.
⁶ **BB-12** is a registered trademark of Chr. Hansen A/S, Denmark.



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Controlling what we can

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Malaysians beware

Prof Teo raises concern that most new treatment costs for cancer far exceed the average income of many individuals living even in high-income countries, and the same could be said of Malaysia as cancer treatment is not affordable to most people here, even to those who are insured or live on an upper-middle income.

"However, the Government is doing all the right things to reduce the burden of lung cancer on the Malaysian public by increasing tobacco tax, tightening regulations for tobacco advertisement and promotion, and

increasing the coverage of smoking bans in public places," she adds.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that nothing will work unless there is awareness among people and they consciously choose what is best for themselves as well as others. While quitting smoking is the first step towards reducing the high incidence rate of lung cancer worldwide, the next step would be understanding and avoiding environmental hazards.

Being diagnosed with lung cancer caused by genetic factors is not in our hands, but we can at least work on reducing modifiable external risk factors such as lifestyle and the environments we choose to expose ourselves to.

Staying strong and supportive

Sim Siew Bee's husband, Tan Wan Chuan (pic), talks about what it was like to have a loved one diagnosed with stage four lung cancer.

"I was in shock and denial when I found out that my wife had stage four cancer that had metastasised to her throat and brain. I was scared that she would not make it, and expected it to be a difficult journey.

"However, she surprised us and proved us all wrong, emerging a strong,

positive person who took the disease head on and triumphed. People ask me how I took care of her, but the truth is that I never had to since she is still taking care of me, the household and our business exactly as she used to before getting diagnosed and did all through her treatment as well.

"It may seem like an exaggeration, but she still outruns me when we go jogging in the morning, even when she is undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy."

According to him, it is her strength that helped him combat his negativity about the disease and not the other way around. Since he experienced it at first hand, he agrees with Sim that positivity and a healthy lifestyle can have a good impact on the success of cancer treatment.

He suggests that family members and friends of a cancer patient provide support to ensure the patient leads a normal life that focuses on the healing process, not the disease.



