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Q What are some of the common misconceptions about colorectal cancer and its symptoms that lead to delayed detection?

The absence of symptoms does not preclude the need for screening. Malaysians may have unnecessary anxieties about any bowel symptoms they may have and this may cause some delay in them seeking medical attention. Symptoms suggestive of colorectal cancer include altered bowel habits, rectal bleeding and abdominal pain.

Q Are there advancements and new discoveries in the risk factors for colorectal cancer?

The more known risk factors include age, family history of colorectal cancer and lifestyle. Other risk factors to point out include polyps, certain hereditary conditions that predispose an individual to early development of polyps past history of colorectal cancer, and Chronic ulcerative colitis (UC).

Q Is it true that colorectal cancer is one of the few cancers that can be "cured" if detected early, and if so, why and how?

The most effective prevention of colon cancer is early detection and removal of precancerous polyps before they turn cancerous. Even in

cases where cancer has already developed, early detection still significantly improves the chances of a cure by surgically removing the cancer before the disease spreads to other organs. The removal of polyps via colonoscopy before they turn cancerous is the most effective way of preventing colorectal cancer.

Q What are some of the major advances in testing and treating colorectal cancer?

In the recent years, we have developed ways to identify specific molecules or biomarkers that can help predict the effectiveness of targeted therapies on cancer cell surface. This ability to test for specific biomarkers in cancer treatment marks the era of personalised and tailored therapy in cancer care.

Q In your opinion, does the high cost of therapy justify the projected life expectancy, even if it is only an extra month or two?

In the setting of advanced cancer, the aims of systemic therapy is not just to simply prolong survival but also to lessen tumour related symptoms through a process of disease control and arrest. As a result, patients who have an advanced disease are able to experience an improved quality of life through good disease palliation.

About The Cancer Advocacy Society of Malaysia (EMPOWERED)

In 2009, EMPOWERED began its mission as a not-for-profit tax-exempt organisation committed to saving lives, preventing cancer, and serving less fortunate cancer patients. To promote awareness about colorectal cancer among low-income communities EMPOWERED carries out workshops, screening programs, and a patient support program, where all costs involved are borne by the organisation. EMPOWERED collaborates with a team of doctors and specialists to ensure that follow-up medical tests, and subsequent cancer treatments are properly administered so that lives can be saved.

Global Cancer Statistics

- Cancer threatens development in women's health and gender equality. Cervical and breast cancer together account for over 750,000 deaths each year with the large majority of deaths occurring in developing countries.
- Over 85% of the 275,000 women who die every year from cervical cancer are from developing countries. If left unchecked, by 2030 cervical cancer will kill as many as 430,000 women per year, virtually all in these countries.
- Cancer now accounts for more deaths worldwide than HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. Of the 7.6 million global deaths from cancer in 2008, more than 55% occurred in less developed regions of the world. By 2030, 60-70% of the estimated 21.4 million new cancer cases per year are predicted to occur in developing countries.
- Based on current trends, tobacco use is estimated to kill one billion people in the 21st century. Addressing tobacco use, which is linked to 71% of all lung cancer deaths, and accounts for at least 22% of all cancer deaths is therefore critical.

(Source: <http://www.worldcancerday.org>)