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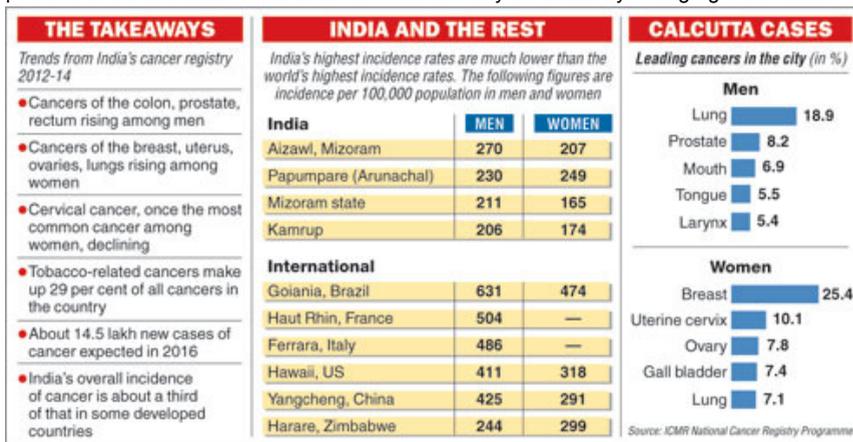
Cancer bad and good news

- Colon & breast afflictions rising in India, finger at food habits & obesity; cervical down

Our Special Correspondent

New Delhi, May 18: A nationwide cancer-tracking programme has revealed a rise in cancers of the colon, prostate and rectum among men and cancers of the breast, lung, uterine endometrium and ovaries among women, pointing to some previously unobserved trends.

The survey, released today by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has shown that about a third of India's cancers appear linked to the use of tobacco, while emerging patterns in the incidence rates of certain cancers may be driven by changing food habits



However, the latest report from the ICMR's cancer registry programme has corroborated a decline observed earlier in the incidence of cervical cancer, which about two decades ago used to be the most common cancer among Indian women.

The report, documenting cancer across 27 towns and cities across the country, has confirmed long-standing observations of the high incidence of cancers of the oesophagus, tongue, nasopharynx and stomach in parts of the northeastern states.

The analysis has determined that tobacco-related cancers accounted for nearly 30 per cent of the estimated 13.8 lakh patients diagnosed with cancer in the country in 2015, while gastrointestinal cancers make up the second largest group, making up 19 per cent of the cancer burden.

"Such periodic cancer trends information is critical in guiding policies to allocate resources and plan preventive steps," said Soumya Swaminathan, director general of the ICMR. "We hope to use such data to identify risk factors and plan appropriate interventions to prevent or reduce the cancer burden," she said.

The ICMR has estimated that about 14.5 lakh patients will develop cancer in India during 2016 with the number expected to rise to 17.3 lakh by 2020. Breast cancer is the leading cancer in India, with an estimate of 1.5 lakh cases for 2016, followed by lung cancer that is expected to strike 1.14 lakh patients this year.

"Food habits, especially the reduced consumption of vegetables and fibre, may be contributing to the increase in the incidence of colon cancer," said A. Nand Kumar, head of the ICMR's cancer registry. Oncologists say the rise in uterine endometrial cancer may be linked to growing obesity among women.

The annual incidence rates of colon cancer shows an increase of about 2.5 per cent in Bangalore, 3.9 per cent in Chennai and 2.2 per cent in Delhi, while uterine endometrial cancer incidence has increased by 5.5 per cent in Bangalore, 3.8 per cent in Chennai, 3.5

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per cent in Delhi and 2.7 per cent in Mumbai.

Senior oncologists familiar with the survey said there are some reassuring trends, including the finding that the overall incidence of cancer in India is still about one-third of that in some developed countries.

"Even if we consider emerging economies such as Brazil and China, our incidence has been a near straight line while theirs are rising," said Rajendra Badwe, director of the Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai. "There must be something good here that we need to figure out and preserve."

Parts of the Northeast have India's highest incidence of cancers, but even there the numbers are much lower than the world's highest incidence rates.

However, rising tobacco use among women appears to be driving the increase in incidence of lung cancer among women - a 3.9 per cent increase in Bangalore, 4.5 per cent in Chennai and 2.8 per cent in Delhi. The incidence of breast cancer increased by 1.4 per cent to 2.8 per cent in several cities.

The analysis has found that only 13 in 100 patients in India are diagnosed with cancer in the earliest stages when it is curable. "This is sad because most cancers are easy to detect and most cancers are curable when detected early," said G.K. Rath, chief of the cancer centre at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

The survey has also confirmed an unusually high incidence of gall bladder cancer among women in northern India that has led doctors to suspect some as yet unexplained connection to either living in the Gangetic plains or previous exposure to typhoid fever.