



**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA**

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**REPORT OF THE ROUND TABLE**

**Cancer prevention and control in the WHO African Region**

1. The Round Table on cancer prevention and control in the WHO African Region was held on 30 August 2007 under the chairmanship of Honourable Dr Anastacio Ruben Sicato, Minister for Health, Angola. In his introductory remarks, the Chairman stated that the subject for discussion was both timely and relevant, given the burden of cancer in sub-Saharan Africa. If no interventions are put in place, it is projected that in the year 2020, the number of new cancer cases will double and the number of deaths due to cancer will increase by 50%.
2. The main risk factors of cancer are diseases such as hepatitis, HIV/AIDS or schistosomiasis; tobacco use; environmental pollution; unhealthy diet; excessive alcohol intake; age and lack of physical exercise. Prevention frequently offers the most cost-effective long-term strategy for cancer control and is recognized as a tool for addressing cancer.
3. The Chairman stated that the majority of countries have no cancer control policy nor comprehensive national cancer control and prevention programme. In most countries, data on the magnitude of cancer are very scanty or nonexistent; infrastructures, facilities and human resources are lacking. The Chairman defined cancer control as the public health action designed to reduce the incidence and mortality due to cancer and improve quality of life of patients, through the systematic implementation of evidence-based strategies for prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care.
4. Experts from WHO headquarters, International Union Against Cancer (UICC), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Ocean Road Cancer Institute (Tanzania) stated the issues and challenges relating to cancer control. They highlighted the WHO Global Action Plan Against Cancer, the Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) programme, UICC activities and eight key interventions to address cancer in the African Region.
5. The audience endorsed the agenda.

6. Participants discussed cancer as a public health problem in countries of the Region. They noted that cancer was increasingly being acknowledged as a public health problem in the African Region. The fight against cancer should be on the national health agendas of all the countries in the Region. However, in the majority of countries, cancer awareness and advocacy work was driven by NGOs while governments should be expected to take the lead.

7. In stating the best approaches to increase awareness on cancer, governments needed to put cancer high on the agenda. Participants mentioned the following key points:

- (a) Countries should have reliable and sustainable surveillance systems.
- (b) Cancer should be put on the global health agenda.
- (c) There is a need for social marketing to increase knowledge about cancer.
- (d) Existing synergies between existing stakeholders should be utilized.
- (e) Cancer services must be in place in order to respond to increased demand; they should be integrated into Primary Health Care.
- (f) Support from NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral international agencies as well as political commitment at the highest level are required.
- (g) Member States are encouraged to annually commemorate World Cancer Day (4 February); they should seize other related opportunities for advocacy.
- (h) Primary prevention should be an integral component of all national cancer control plans (NCCPs).

8. Various recommendations were made on how countries can set up comprehensive cancer control programmes. They include:

- (a) Countries should embark on National Cancer Control Plans (NCCPs) based on WHO guidelines as adapted to the local situation.
- (b) The implementation of the plan should be in a step-wise manner as resources permit.
- (c) The development of cancer registries is an integral part of the NCCP.
- (d) The development and implementation of the NCCP should involve all national stakeholders.
- (e) Share best practices and cost-effective strategies.
- (f) The WHO Regional Office for Africa was encouraged to finalize cancer control strategies for Africa along the lines of the WHO Global Action Plan Against Cancer.

9. All delegates agreed that Africa cannot fight cancer alone, and collaboration with all stakeholders was necessary to:

- (a) Establish centres of excellence for all components of cancer control.
- (b) Build capacity in all personnel involved in cancer prevention and control.
- (c) Establish a network of cancer centres.