

UKZN, Cansa partner for lung cancer research project

Cansa is partnering with the University of KwaZulu-Natal-Multinational Lung Cancer Control Programme (UKZN-MLCCP) under the leadership of Dr Themba Ginindza and other co-principal investigators for a three-year period.



The purpose of the programme is to improve knowledge and awareness of lung cancer, its risk factors and symptoms, and to positively affect community attitudes towards lung cancer screening and diagnosis. Further goals are to increase the uptake of lung cancer screening in high-risk groups through community mobilisation at identified sites with community screening services as provided by the project team leaders

Cansa will focus on establishing community screening and community support services; provide multi-level training for community fieldworkers; promote palliative care services for lung cancer patients and track patient outcomes.

Lorraine Govender, Cansa's manager in KwaZulu-Natal elaborates, "Lung cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths amongst men and women worldwide, and in South Africa, it is the number one cause of cancer-related deaths. The National Cancer Registry reported that, in 2017, lung cancer was the third most diagnosed cancer amongst men and the fifth most amongst women. According to Bruni, et al (2019), the 2018 burden of lung cancer in South Africa was estimated at 8,239 and 7,770 annual lung cancer cases and deaths, respectively. As captured in the 2017 National Cancer Registry Report, lung cancer remains one of the top cancers among men and women in South Africa."

Most commonly, many patients present to health facilities with advanced symptoms of lung cancer. This project will address the identified gaps in lung cancer awareness and early diagnosis through a multi-facet and sustained awareness programme targeted at five communities located in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal.

“Public private partnerships of this nature certainly strengthens Cansa’s footprint in communities at grassroots level allowing more communities to benefit from education and awareness on common cancer affecting the South African public. Early detection can save lives,” added Govender.

The programme also aims to screen people, educate about symptoms and empower them with information to promote early awareness and detection. Referrals will be made to appropriate clinics or hospitals for further investigation and medical care. The programme is to make use of trained volunteers to engage with communities on various platforms, including talks, events, exhibitions in public spaces, videos in health and clinic facilities, media interviews, social media and print media.

Siyabonga Dlamini from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, adds, “The overall goal of the MLCCP is to improve access to early diagnostic services for lung cancer by addressing the barriers of cancer care through working with communities and the Ministries of Health in the identified regions in four countries (South Africa, Kenya, Swaziland, and Tanzania), with a potential for scale-up. We’re excited to partner with Cansa in Phase Two of the programme. We need to positively influence attitudes towards lung cancer screening and improve lung cancer screening in risk groups.”

The main risk factor for lung cancer (internationally) is tobacco smoking. Lung cancer is more common among men. As more women have started smoking, the number of women developing lung cancer has been on the increase. However, while lung cancer is pervasive among smokers, it is not limited to them, as people who do not smoke can also develop lung cancer. Approximately 10–15% of people who get lung cancer have never smoked.

Other risk factors include the effects of past cancer treatment and exposure to asbestos, radon gas and – very rare cases – substances such as uranium, chromium and nickel. Lung cancer is not infectious and cannot be passed on to other people.

Govender concludes, “Volunteers are being trained in February and will attend Palliative care training to be conducted by one of the Bristol-Meyers Squibb Foundation partners who is an ardent advocate of palliative care in South Africa. Certain sites in Durban and Pietermaritzburg have already been identified for the awareness and screening phase that will be rolled out in early March and will strictly adhere to the applicable Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions, as they may be revised from time-to-time.”

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