

Understanding cancer: what it is and how it affects us



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The statement of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion is an alarming one. It says that while cancer remains the leading cause of death in the United States, this disease is expected to become the leading cause of mortality in the next decade, surpassing heart disease which has been on top of the list for several years now. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), the oldest description of cancer was discovered in Egypt and dates back to approximately 1600 B. C. The Edwin Smith Papyrus described cases of breast ulcers that were treated by cauterization with a tool called “ the fire drill. ”

The Latin term “ cancer” which originally means “ crab” was coined by Celsus after the Greek term “ carcinoma” which refers to malignant tumor derived from epithelial cells. Through the centuries, it was found out that this disease is characterized by the development of abnormal cells that divide uncontrollably and have the ability to infiltrate and destroy normal body tissue. It does not discriminate when it comes to race, age and sex.

In the United States, the ACS estimates that half of the men and one-third of the women will develop cancer in their lifetimes. The brighter side, however, is the fact that more and more cancer patients are now being successfully treated. Thanks to the technologies and efforts of the health industry in marking progress in cancer prevention, early detection and treatment. The fight against cancer is really not an easy one. However, with the concerted efforts of the government and the healthcare industry, coupled with public cooperation, the battle to record a declining trend in cancer mortality is very much possible.

The government in particular must ensure proper implementation of relevant programs, continued research in primary prevention and detection, and recognition of the significance of science and technology in combating cancer. Above all these, what we have to remember is that our genetic makeup, our lifestyle choices, and the environment are significant factors that can set the stage for this disease. How we live our life remains to be of utmost importance.