



Antismoking Campaign: What is the Right Way Forward

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Cancer is a health problem in India. There are sudden surge of newly diagnosed cancer patients in India. Recent surge in cancer patient number is mostly attributed to increased awareness, better cancer detection tools and also increase in number of cancer treatment facility. It is assumed that by 2020 every household will have at least one cancer patient survivor or have experienced the treatment related issues.

Cancer in Indian subcontinent and in western world have a contrasting difference in presentation, cause of the disease, treatment options and facilities and most importantly in outcome. Cancer in Indian patients is mostly related to tobacco usage or environmental reasons, whereas western patients are mostly related to genetic and unknown factors. Interestingly, environmental and tobacco related cancers are 'preventable' cancers. Unfortunately, 70% of cancers in India are preventable, more sad is they are detected in advanced stage with only minimal chance of cure. In Indian subcontinent, especially in smaller towns and cities there are severe discord between the huge patient number and lack of treatment facility. In India, late diagnosis, relative aggressive in nature and lack of treatment facilities make outcome of tobacco related cancers dismal. More than 70% of patients are in advanced disease and only 30 - 40% of patients have relatively long survival. Tobacco related cancers are mostly cancer of head and neck region, mostly in oral cavity, oropharynx and laryngeal cancers, lung cancer, oesophageal cancers and bladder cancer. Oral cavity cancers are most common cancer in Indian male patients. Nearly 70% of male cancers in this region are of oral cavity region.

Tobacco usages are of different kind in different parts of India. In North East states, chewing 'Gutka' mostly uses tobacco and as people keep it between the gum and cheek region, patients mostly suffer from cancer of gingivo-buccal cancer or cancer of 'cheek'. In North India, cancer of larynx and oesophagus are more common as people inhale the partially burst tobacco leading to 'carcinogens'. There are many forms of cigarette used - bidi, cigars, filtered and unfiltered cigarettes, unfortunately none of them have shown to be

more safe than the other. Role of smoking as the cancer-causing factor is proven beyond doubt. In western world, with increase in tobacco usage there was an increase in cancer and last decades with aggressive campaigning against smoking, both tobacco usage and incidence of tobacco related cancers have dramatically decreased. Law against tobacco usage may help in tobacco cessation campaign, but need to have political will to implement the law. There are both lack of political will and government not willing to sacrifice the financial is stopping all the state organizations in tobacco probation. Long-term tobacco users also may not agree with complete probation.

The impact of aggressive campaigning against tobacco usage is doubtful. Many times, it boomerangs and works to promote smoking. Curiosity is the first triggering point in young people to initiate smoking and then they fall in the prey of addiction. Education about the harmful effect will help young generation to keep them away from tobacco usage. Deglamorize smoking will help young people not to start usage of tobacco. In fact, associating shame with public usage of tobacco is an extremely effective step to preventing tobacco usage. Education in susceptible students helps the cause. Unfortunately, there is severe non-compliance in smoking cessation campaigns among elderly habitual smokers. It is difficult to quit smoking, but easy not to start it. So, most effective slogan to reduce tobacco usage is 'Educate them young' and 'don't start smoking'. We know 'quitting smoking is quite difficult'.

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