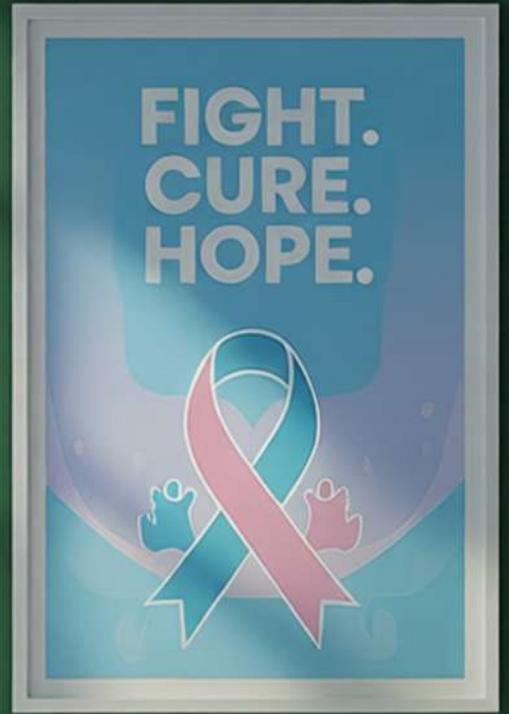


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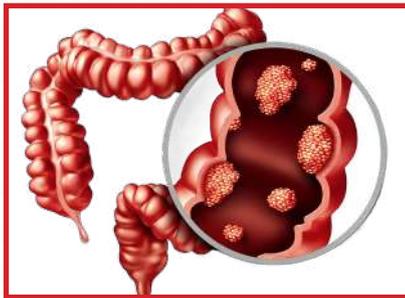
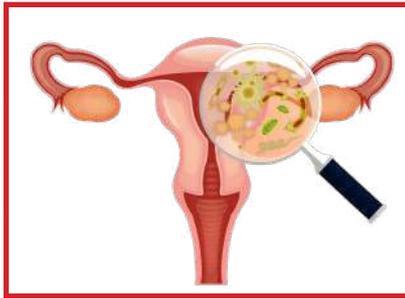
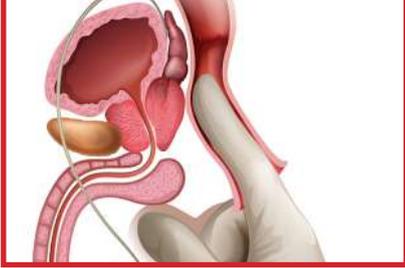
Cancer



Special Feature:
Health Community of West Africa Association
Partnership Webinar Spotlights Gold Standard
in Lab Testing Accuracy and Patient Safety
See page..... 15

Men's Health:
Understanding Penile
Cancer
See page.....19





Contents

Editorial	3
Organ	4
Special Report	5 - 6
Women's Health	7
Health News	8
Health and Technology	9 - 10
Africa in focus	11
Health Myth Buster	12
Mental Health	13
Skin Health	14
Special Feature	5 - 16
News Desk	17 - 18
Men's Health	19 - 20
Disease in Focus	21 - 22
Health and Wellness	23 - 24
Healthy Recipe Hack	25
Family Health	26
Ask the Expert	27 - 28
Healthy Living	29
Health Terms	30



HCOWAA: Advancing Healthcare Standards in West Africa

The Health Community of West Africa Association (HCOWAA), based in Ghana, is a non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing healthcare across West Africa. Addressing the uneven distribution of medical resources, HCOWAA advocates for regional cooperation through a Health Alliance that unites healthcare stakeholders to create a cohesive health community.

With a mission to improve health outcomes in West Africa, HCOWAA facilitates collaboration, innovation, and research among professionals, leveraging collective resources to enhance healthcare services, policies, and access. HCOWAA envisions a resilient West African healthcare system where institutions and professionals lead groundbreaking research, foster innovation, and influence policies that elevate regional healthcare.

Through initiatives like establishing a regional healthcare database, launching research projects, and hosting policy roundtables, HCOWAA builds strong networks to drive healthcare advancements. Advocacy efforts focus on equitable access, supporting vulnerable populations, and addressing healthcare disparities. The organization's objectives include fostering research and innovation, supporting health policy reforms, and integrating medical equipment manufacturers with healthcare facilities.

HCOWAA also facilitates training programs, academic exchanges, and research grants, ensuring members are equipped with knowledge and skills to address regional health challenges effectively. Networking events like the HCOWAA Medical and Health Industry Investment Summit & Expo connect professionals, offering a platform for partnership and knowledge sharing.

HCOWAA's commitment extends to partnerships with international health organizations and academic institutions, which amplify its impact by introducing global best practices and strengthening West African healthcare infrastructure. Collaborative efforts with international partners promote training, research, and infrastructure upgrades for health facilities, pharmaceutical establishments, and clinics.

In addition, HCOWAA's magazine partnerships, including an MoU with Health Pulse Magazine, provide platforms to publish relevant content, share insights, and enhance visibility for ongoing initiatives. Through these combined efforts, HCOWAA aims to foster a collaborative healthcare environment that not only addresses urgent health challenges but also builds a sustainable, inclusive healthcare future for West Africa.

EXECUTIVE PUBLISHERS

Mr. David Tai
Anna Jiang

CHIEF EDITOR

Gloria Addo

GROWTH AND STRATEGY TEAM

David Tai
Sihong Jiang
Prince Opoku Dogbey

DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Prince Opoku Dogbey

EDITORIAL CREATIVE DESIGNERS

Emmanuel Lawoh Teleno
Banahene Kwame Osei-Assibey

CONTENT DEVELOPERS

Gloria Addo
Elikem Richeal Dovia
Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor
Marilyn Tiphaine Fifame

DIGITAL MARKETER

Apedo Delali Asher





Cancer Is Not Inevitable;

Prevention Must Become the World's First Line of Defence.

For decades, cancer has been spoken about mainly in the language of treatment: new drugs, advanced machines, specialised centres. Yet a new global analysis by the World Health Organization (WHO) and its cancer research arm, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), delivers a striking and hopeful message—up to four in ten cancer cases worldwide could be prevented.

The study, released ahead of World Cancer Day on February 4, estimates that 37 per cent of all new cancer cases in 2022—about 7.1 million people—were linked to avoidable causes. Tobacco use, harmful alcohol consumption, obesity, physical inactivity, air pollution, ultraviolet radiation and, for the first time in such a global review, nine cancer-causing infections, were all identified as major drivers. These are not distant scientific abstractions; they are everyday exposures shaped by policy choices, environments and personal behaviour.

Tobacco remains the single largest preventable cause, responsible for 15 per cent of new cancer cases worldwide. Infections such as *Helicobacter pylori* and human papillomavirus (HPV) follow closely, together accounting for one in ten cases, while alcohol contributes another three per cent. Lung, stomach and cervical cancers—linked respectively to smoking and polluted air, bacterial infection, and HPV—make up nearly half of all preventable cancers globally.

What makes these findings impossible to ignore is their uneven burden. Men carry a heavier share of preventable cancers than women—45 per cent versus 30 per cent—largely because of higher smoking and alcohol use. Among women, infections and rising obesity loom large. Regionally, the contrasts are stark: preventable cancers among women range from 24 per cent in North Africa and West Asia to 38 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, while in men they soar to 57 per cent in East Asia but fall to 28 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. These differences reflect not

biology, but social realities—poverty, pollution, occupational hazards, weak regulation, limited vaccination coverage and fragile health systems.

The implication is clear: cancer prevention is not simply a medical issue; it is a political, economic and environmental one. Strong tobacco control laws, higher alcohol taxes, clean-air policies, safer workplaces, healthy urban design, and access to nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity can save millions of lives. So can scaling up vaccination against HPV and hepatitis B—interventions already proven to prevent cervical and liver cancers.

As Dr André Ilbawi of WHO notes, this is the first analysis to quantify, at a global level, how much cancer risk comes from causes we can change. His colleague at IARC, Dr Isabelle Soerjomataram, calls tackling these risks “one of the most powerful opportunities to reduce the global cancer burden.” They are right. Few health strategies promise such sweeping impact at relatively modest cost.

Governments, however, cannot act alone. Schools, city planners, employers, energy regulators, transport authorities and the media all shape the conditions in which people live—and the risks they face. Coordinated action across these sectors could prevent millions of families from ever hearing the words, “You have cancer,” while easing the crushing long-term costs of treatment on health systems.

The message from this global study is not one of despair, but of possibility. Cancer will not disappear overnight. But if four in ten cases can be prevented, then inaction becomes the most dangerous risk factor of all. Prevention must move from the margins of health policy to its very centre—because the fight against cancer begins long before a patient enters a hospital ward.

The Vulva

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

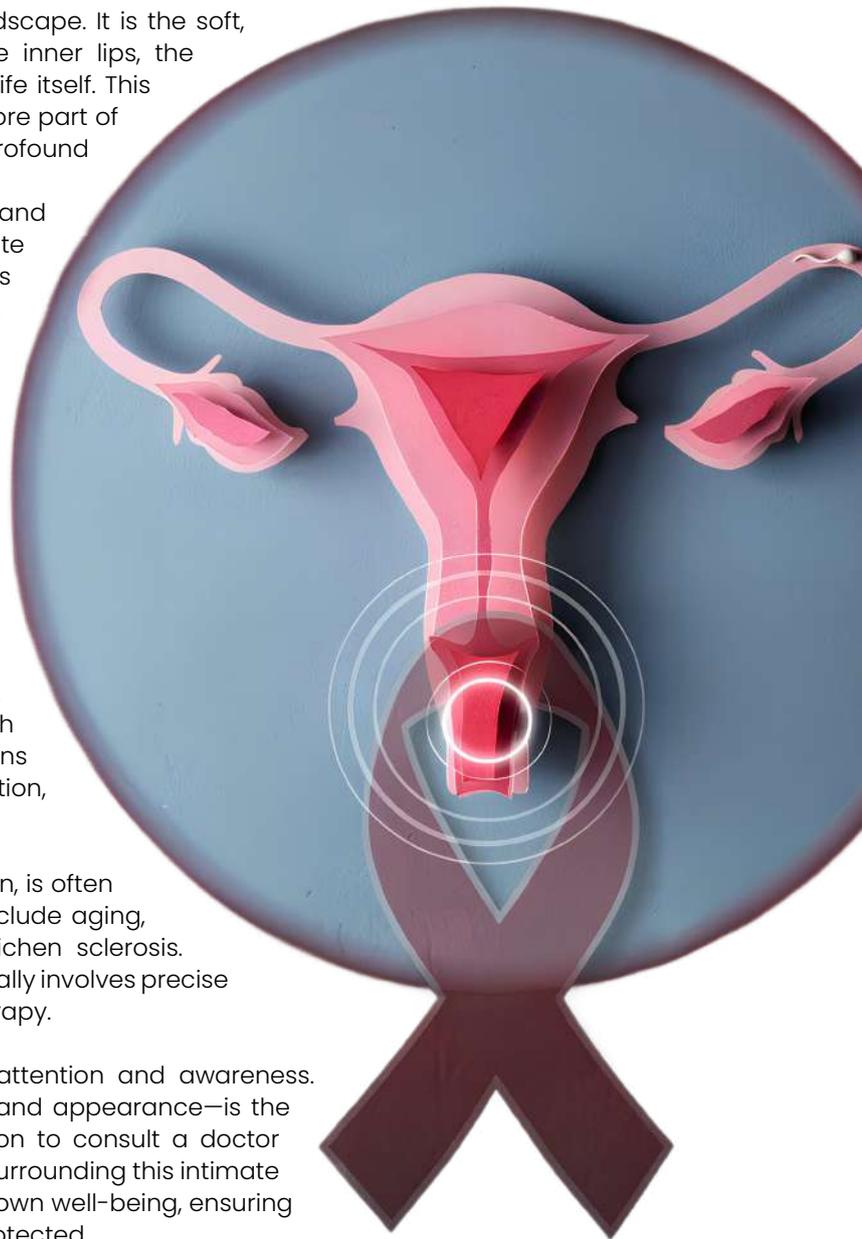
The vulva is not just anatomy; it is a living landscape. It is the soft, protective folds of the outer lips, the delicate inner lips, the hidden seat of sensation, and the gateway to life itself. This region, rich with unique color and texture, is a core part of female identity—a terrain of both power and profound vulnerability.

The outer folds, the labia majora, are soft and protective. Within them lie the more delicate labia minora, framing the entrance. Here rests the clitoris, a center of sensation, and below, the openings to the urethra and vagina. This landscape varies in color—from deep rose to brown—and in texture. It is a map of individual womanhood, vital, sensitive and deserving of careful attention.

Because it is living tissue, the vulva is not immune to change or disease. The primary concern here is vulvar cancer, a rare but serious condition. It most often begins in the skin cells, presenting as a persistent change. Symptoms can include an itch or sore that won't heal, a noticeable lump, thickened skin, or a patch of altered color (red, white, or dark). These signs are subtle and easily mistaken for common irritation, which is why awareness is key.

The primary cause, especially in younger women, is often the human papillomavirus (HPV). Other risks include aging, smoking, or a chronic skin condition called lichen sclerosis. Diagnosis requires a biopsy, and treatment typically involves precise surgery, sometimes with radiation or chemotherapy.

The true importance of vulvar health lies in attention and awareness. Knowing your own normal landscape—its feel and appearance—is the first defense. Any persistent change is a reason to consult a doctor without embarrassment. By ending the silence surrounding this intimate terrain, women can become guardians of their own well-being, ensuring that this vital gateway is seen, cared for, and protected.





Health Community of West Africa Association and Essence Clinic Provide Free Rapid HPV Screening on World Cancer Day

The fight against cervical cancer in Ghana witnessed a significant technological advancement during World Cancer Day event at the Teshie Community Clinic on 6th February, 2026. The programme, themed “Closing the Care Gap: Community Action for Cancer Prevention and Early Detection in Ghana”, saw the Health Community of West Africa Association and its member, Essence Clinic and Medical Laboratory, introduce and deploy a revolutionary rapid screening test, conducting free screenings for dozens of women on the spot.

Mr. Benjamin Mensah, representing both the Association and Essence Clinic, delivered a stark reminder that cervical cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer death among Ghanaian women. He then presented a powerful new tool in the fight: an FDA-approved Rapid HPV test kit.

“We have introduced the Rapid HPV test kits, which produce results within 15 minutes, if we take a lab test and have to get results days later, it makes it difficult

to even reach those we tested. This kit is a new approach to fight cervical cancer.” Mr. Mensah announced.

He explained that this innovation directly addresses a critical gap in the care continuum. A positive result allows Essence Clinic to immediately redirect the patient to the next course of action, preventing the loss to follow-up that often occurs with slower, traditional testing methods. “The time for losing our wives, mothers, sisters, and grandmothers has to come to an end,” he stated emphatically.

Following the speeches, Essence Clinic set up a dedicated screening station. In a powerful demonstration of community-based action, over 50 women from Teshie and surrounding areas received free, confidential cervical cancer screenings using the new rapid HPV test kits. This immediate service turned awareness into tangible healthcare access.



The event, chaired by Teshie Paramount Chief Nii Ashitey III, underscored the theme of community action. Other speakers, including Dr. Patricia Boamah, a Pediatric Oncologist at the Greater Accra Regional Hospital (RIDGE), and Dr. Robert Amesiya of the Ghana Health Service, highlighted the importance of early detection for all cancers. Survivor testimonies and messages from the WHO and Ministry of Health reinforced the national commitment to closing the care gap.

The keynote address by Dr. Lawrence Ofori Boadu, Director of Clinical Service, Ghana Health Service (GHS) on behalf of Professor Samuel Kaba Akoriyea echoed the day's practical spirit, stating, "Cancer is not only a hospital disease but a community disease... Our biggest challenge is late detection and delay in care seeking."

The day concluded with a strong call from community leaders and health professionals for continued collaboration, ensuring that such advanced screening tools become widely accessible across Ghana. The successful integration of cutting-edge technology with immediate, free community service by the Health Community of West Africa Association and Essence Clinic provided a compelling



Unraveling the Enigma of Ovarian Cancer

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

For years, ovarian cancer has lived under a quiet and misleading name the “silent killer.” This label speaks less to the truth of the illness and more to our struggle to hear it. The difficulty is not that it makes no sound, but that its language is easily mistaken. Its symptoms borrow the common grammar of everyday discomfort: a swelling in the belly that lingers, a sudden feeling of fullness after a small meal, a dull pressure low in the pelvis, or a new urgency to use the bathroom. Alone, these signs are easy to dismiss. Together, and when they persist week after week, they form a distinct sentence the body is trying to speak.

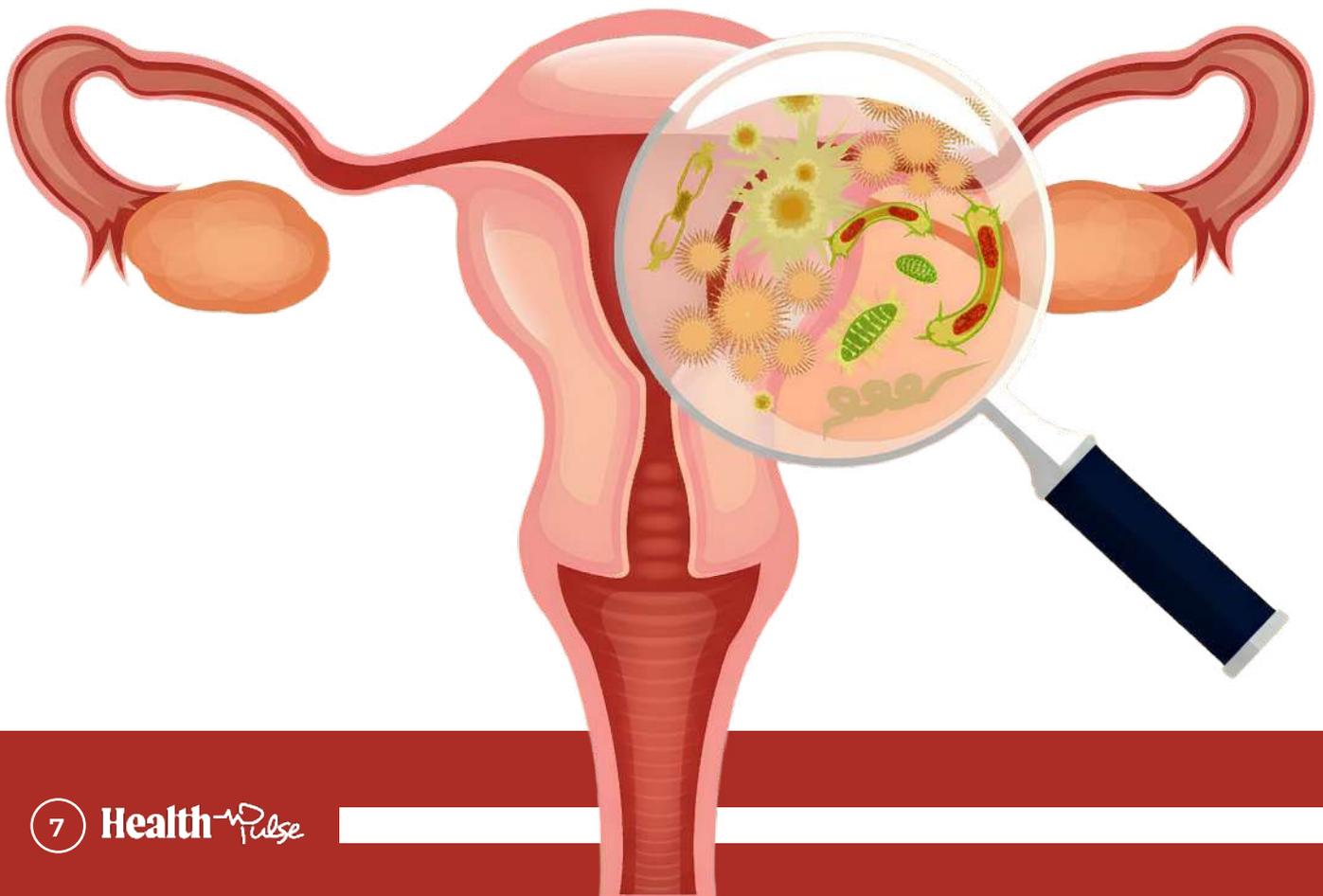
The deeper challenge lies in our tools, or rather, the lack of a certain one. Unlike other cancers, there is no simple scan or blood

test for the average woman to rely on for peace of mind. This absence means that listening to one’s own body and speaking plainly to a doctor become the most critical first steps. The women who navigate this path most successfully are often those who trust a feeling that something is not right and gently insist on being heard.

While any woman can face this illness, some carry a higher thread of risk woven through their family story—a history of breast or ovarian cancer in a mother or sister, or known genetic changes passed through generations. Age, too, writes its own line. Yet there are also threads of protection, such as the long-term use of birth control pills, which can lower the risk over a lifetime.

When concerns lead to investigation, the path forward becomes clearer. Surgery often serves as both the moment of truth for diagnosis and the beginning of treatment, aiming to remove the illness with careful precision. What follows has changed dramatically in recent years. New medicines, designed for women with specific inherited traits, can now target the cancer’s hidden weaknesses, offering more time and a stronger quality of life than was possible before.

Ovarian cancer may speak in a whisper, but we are learning to lean in and listen. And in that act of listening, we find the first and most powerful form of hope.





Rising Colorectal Cancer Deaths Raise Concern as Other Cancer Mortality Declines in Young Adults

Recent global health data show a promising trend: fewer young adults are dying from many of the world's leading cancers. Advances in early detection, improved treatment, and better prevention strategies have contributed to declining mortality from several major cancer types. However, one alarming exception is emerging colorectal cancer.

Unlike other cancers, deaths from colorectal cancer are increasing among young adults, making it one of the most concerning cancer threats for people under 50. While mortality from cancers such as lung, breast, leukemia, and other major types continues to decline, colorectal cancer is moving in the opposite direction, raising serious public health concerns.

Health experts describe this shift as a critical warning sign. Medical progress has significantly improved survival outcomes for many cancers, but colorectal cancer has not benefited equally from these advances. One major contributing factor is late-stage diagnosis. Younger adults are often diagnosed only after symptoms become severe, reducing treatment success and survival chances. Common warning signs include rectal bleeding, persistent abdominal pain, changes in bowel habits, unexplained weight loss, and chronic fatigue symptoms that are frequently ignored or misattributed to less serious conditions.

Another challenge is low screening rates among younger populations. While screening guidelines have been updated in many regions to start earlier, awareness and access remain limited. Many young adults do not perceive themselves to be at risk, leading to delayed testing and missed opportunities for early detection.

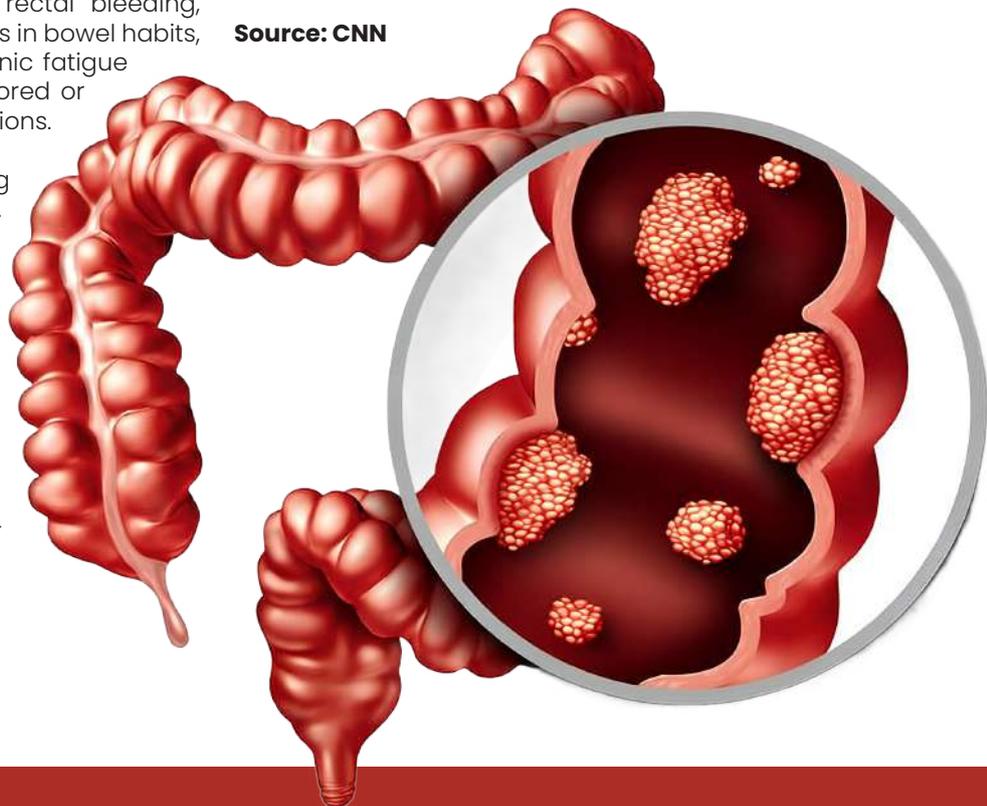
Researchers are still working to understand why colorectal cancer

is rising in younger age groups. Possible contributing factors include poor diet, physical inactivity, obesity, increased consumption of ultra-processed foods, environmental exposures, and changes in gut health. These lifestyle and environmental influences highlight the growing connection between modern living patterns and cancer risk.

Public health experts stress that this trend is a wake-up call. Cancer is no longer only a disease of older age. Young adults must become more aware of their cancer risks, recognize early warning signs, and seek medical attention promptly. Health systems, in turn, must strengthen awareness campaigns, expand access to screening, and integrate prevention strategies into routine healthcare services.

As progress continues in reducing deaths from many cancers, the rise of colorectal cancer in young adults stands as a reminder that prevention, early detection, and lifestyle-focused health policies remain essential to protecting future generations and reversing this dangerous trend.

Source: CNN



How Modern Radiology is Winning the Early Fight Against Cancer

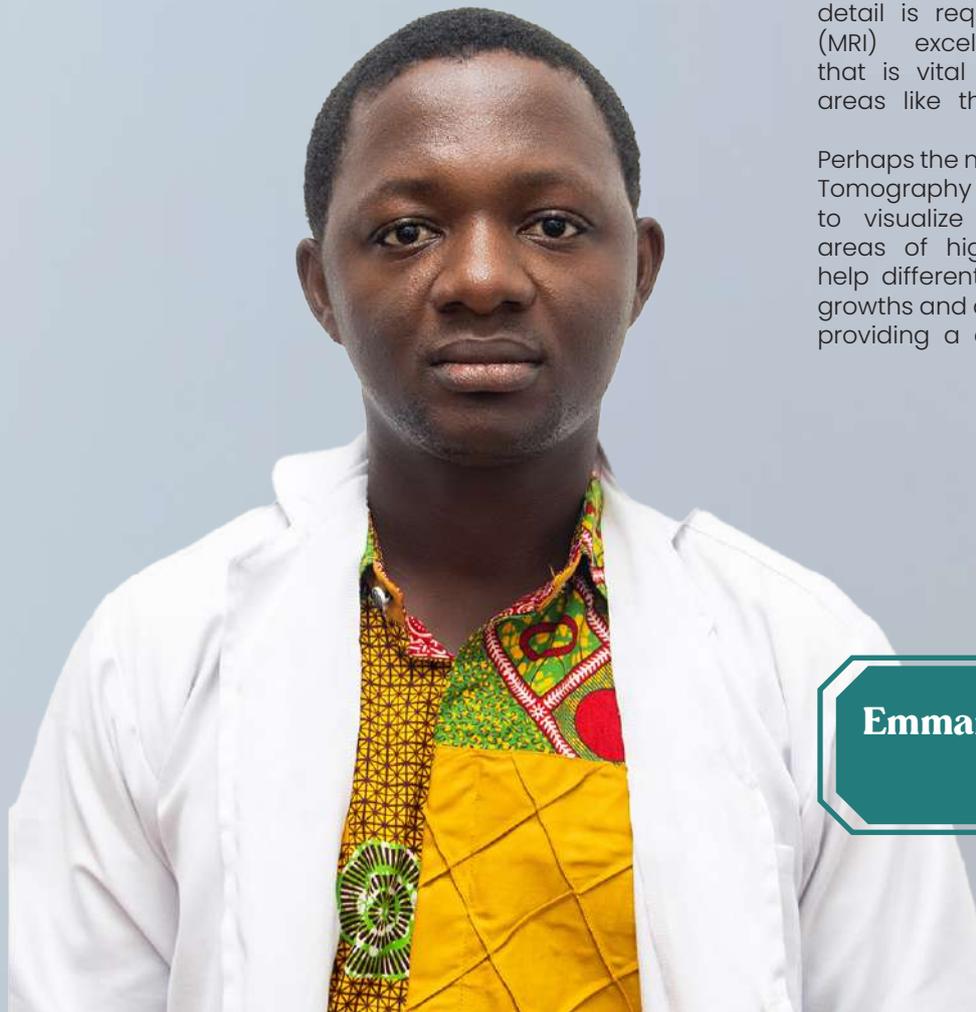
In the critical battle against cancer, the greatest ally is time. Detecting the disease early, before it spreads, dramatically improves the odds of successful treatment and survival. At the forefront of this preemptive strike is modern radiology, a field where technological advancement has revolutionized our ability to see inside the human body with unprecedented clarity and precision.

Radiology utilizes a powerful arsenal of medical imaging techniques, each playing a specialized role in the cancer diagnostic journey. It begins with

foundational tools like X-rays and mammography, a specialized X-ray that can identify breast tumors long before they are physically palpable. Ultrasound provides real-time imaging to distinguish between harmless fluid-filled cysts and solid, potentially malignant masses in organs like the liver and thyroid.

For a more detailed view, Computed Tomography (CT) scans construct intricate, cross-sectional images of the body. This allows oncologists to not only locate a tumor but precisely measure its size and determine if the cancer has metastasized to other organs. When even greater soft-tissue detail is required, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) excels, offering exceptional contrast that is vital for diagnosing cancers in complex areas like the brain, spinal cord, and prostate.

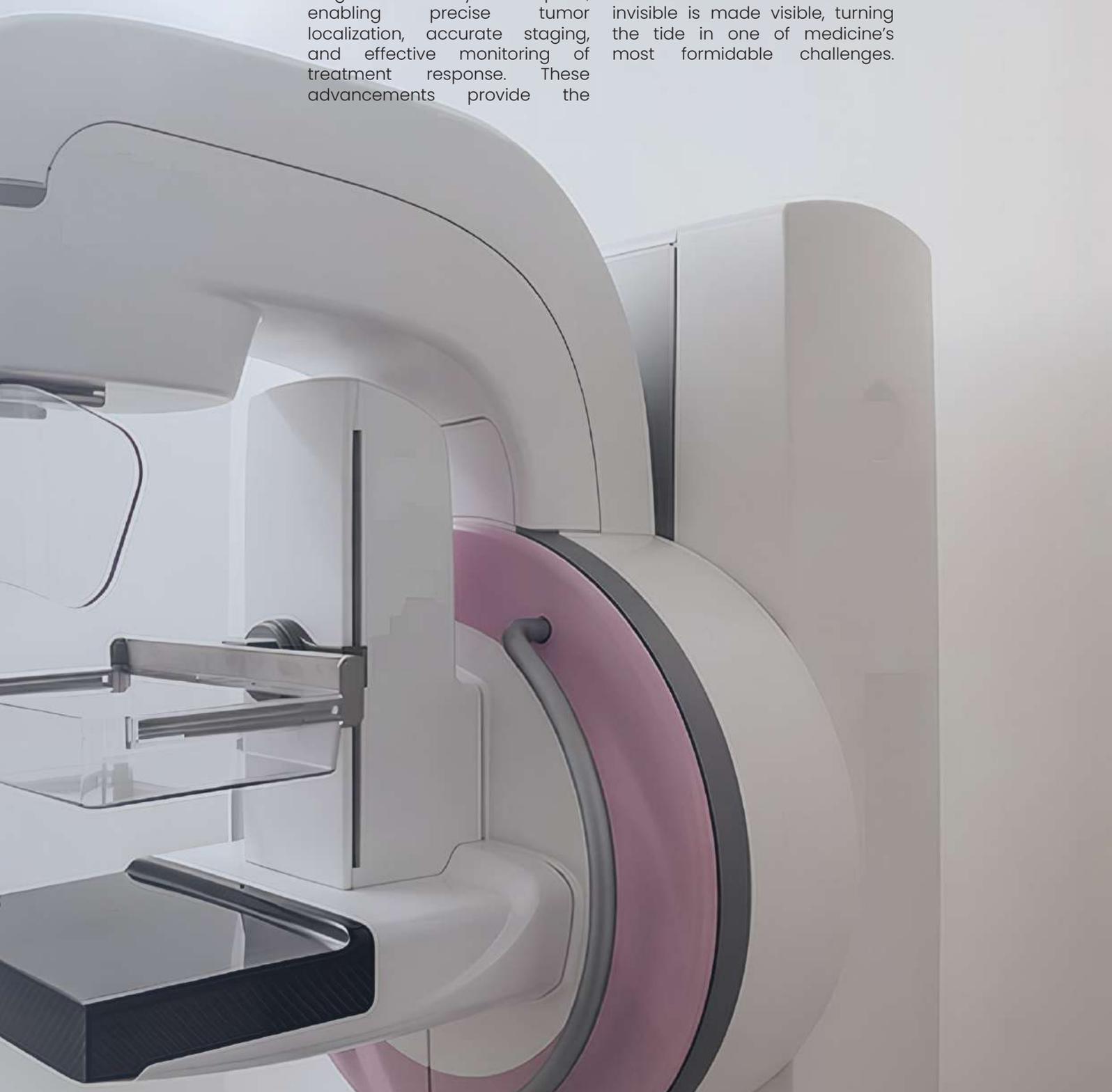
Perhaps the most advanced tool is Positron Emission Tomography (PET), which moves beyond anatomy to visualize metabolic activity. By highlighting areas of high cellular function, PET scans can help differentiate between benign and malignant growths and assess the aggressiveness of a cancer, providing a crucial guide for treatment intensity.



Emmanuel Atta Antwi
Radiologist

In conclusion, the technological evolution in radiology has fundamentally transformed oncology. It has shifted the paradigm from late-stage diagnosis to early interception, enabling precise tumor localization, accurate staging, and effective monitoring of treatment response. These advancements provide the

diagnostic confidence that guides personalized treatment plans, offering patients not just hope, but a significantly improved pathway to better health outcomes and enhanced survival rates. The invisible is made visible, turning the tide in one of medicine's most formidable challenges.



Zambia's Cancer Fight Defies Odds, Offers Roadmap For Nations

Confronted with one of the world's highest rates of cervical cancer and virtually no system to fight it, Zambia embarked two decades ago on a health strategy so unconventional it is now drawing global attention. By choosing action over idealism, the nation has screened more than 1.5 million women and created a model that is reshaping cancer prevention across Africa.

In the early 2000s, Zambia's reality was stark: a single lab technician for a nation of 12 million, an oncology workforce that could be counted on one hand, and a legacy of neglect that had left tens of thousands of women vulnerable. With HIV accelerating cervical cancer rates, the crisis was urgent.

Instead of waiting for perfect infrastructure or foreign funding, health officials launched a "build-while-doing" program in 2006. They turned nurses into frontline cancer screeners, integrated screenings into ubiquitous HIV clinics, and deployed low-cost tests. This pragmatic shift allowed services to scale at unprecedented speed, moving from a pilot project to a national program covering all ten provinces.

Perhaps the most decisive factor, however, was forged outside clinic walls. Zambia's program enlisted the nation's traditional leaders as its most credible ambassadors. Royal figures like Senior Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo

II publicly championed screenings and even had her granddaughters receive the first HPV vaccines, sending a powerful signal that broke through stigma and distrust.

"Progress doesn't need perfection," concluded a recent World Bank analysis of the program. "It comes from refusing to wait, from shaping the systems you have to fit the lives of the women they are meant to serve."

The tangible results have made Zambia a destination for health ministers across the continent. Last November, delegates from eight countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, toured Zambian health centers to witness the approach firsthand.

For nations struggling with tight budgets and overstretched health workers, Zambia's lesson is clear: transformative change begins not with abundant resources, but with the resolve to use what you have, where you are, for those who need it most.

Source: World Bank Group



Is Cancer Contagious?



Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

When a loved one is diagnosed with cancer, a natural wave of questions follows. Amidst concerns about treatment and recovery, one quiet worry sometimes surfaces: “Can I catch it?” The resounding answer from the medical community is a firm and reassuring no. Cancer, in the course of ordinary daily life, is not a contagious disease. You cannot contract it from the air someone breathes, from their touch, or by sharing a meal.

This fundamental truth is rooted in biology. Cancer arises from mutations within an individual’s own cells, leading to uncontrolled growth. These cells are uniquely tailored to the person in whom they developed. When transferred to another healthy individual, a different immune system swiftly recognizes and destroys these foreign cells. The idea of cancer spreading like a virus or common cold is a persistent myth, but one without scientific basis.

However, the complete picture, while upholding this central

fact, does contain rare and specific exceptions that are important to understand. The only documented instances of cancer transmission between people occur in the highly controlled and unusual context of organ or tissue transplantation. In these exceedingly rare cases, an organ from a donor with an undiagnosed cancer could potentially introduce cancerous cells to the recipient. It is crucial to contextualize this risk: it is estimated to occur in roughly two out of every 10,000 transplants. The medical system is structured to prevent this, with stringent donor screening protocols in place to avoid using tissue from those with a known cancer history. This exceptional scenario underscores the rule—it is a managed risk in a life-saving procedure, not a reflection of how cancer operates in society.

Confusion often arises from the well-established link between certain contagious agents and cancer. Viruses like some strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV) and bacteria like *Helicobacter pylori* are known to significantly increase the risk of developing specific cancers over time. The critical distinction lies in what is actually being spread. While the HPV virus or *H. pylori* bacterium can be transmitted between people—through intimate contact or shared utensils, for example—the cancer itself cannot. An individual may develop cervical cancer from a long-term HPV infection, but they pose no risk of passing that cancer to their partner or family. They could pass the virus, but the recipient’s body will respond to that infection independently, with their own set of genetic and environmental factors determining the outcome.



Fractured Reflections:

Cancer's Impact on Identity

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

When we speak of cancer survival, we often speak in the language of medicine: remission, recovery, and resilience. These terms mark the triumphant end of a physical battle. Yet, for the survivor standing before the mirror in the quiet aftermath of treatment, a different, more personal war often begins. This is the internal struggle with a body that feels foreign and a self that feels lost—a profound mental health crisis born from body image disturbance and a shattered sense of identity.

The trauma of cancer is not left behind in the treatment chair or the surgical suite; it is etched onto the skin and carried in the bones. Treatments that save lives do so at a cost that is deeply personal. A mastectomy is not just a procedure; it is the removal of a part of the self that may have been linked to femininity, intimacy, and self-perception. An ostomy is not just an appliance; it is a daily, physical reminder of vulnerability and change. The loss of hair from chemotherapy is not merely temporary; it is a visible, public stripping away of one's familiar face, a symbol of illness worn for all to see.

This radical alteration of the physical self creates a painful chasm between who a person feels they are on the inside and who they see reflected on the outside. The reflection can become a source of grief, not recognition. This is more than simple dissatisfaction; it is a form of psychological dislocation. The body, once a home, can feel like a

hostile landscape of scars and reminders. Social withdrawal is a common consequence, as the mental energy required to face the world in a body that feels unfamiliar is simply too great.

This crisis of self is a legitimate and serious mental health challenge, one that requires the same care and validation as the physical disease itself. Healing involves grieving the losses—of body parts, of certainty, of a former life—with the same seriousness with which one fought the disease. Therapeutic support can help in reframing the narrative, guiding a person to see their scars not merely as wounds, but as testaments to resilience; to view their changed body not as broken, but as a map of a profound journey survived.





When Skincare Leaves a Toxic Trace

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

In our quest for radiant skin and the perfect shade, we often focus on the promises printed on the label: hydration, renewal, a brighter complexion. Yet, some of the most significant risks in personal care products come from ingredients that frequently go unlisted. Heavy metals like lead and mercury can be silent stowaways in everyday items, from a tube of lipstick to a jar of skin-lightening cream. Unlike ingredients that wash away, these toxins pose a unique danger because they can accumulate within the body over years of use, creating a burden that lasts long after the product is gone.

The presence of lead in lipstick is a concerning example of this slow accumulation. A known neurotoxin, lead is not added intentionally but often appears as a contaminant in the mineral pigments that provide rich, lasting color. The risk is woven into the very act of application. With each swipe, tiny amounts can be ingested or absorbed. Repeated daily over months and years, this low-level exposure allows lead to settle into bones and tissues, where it may remain for decades. While regulatory bodies like the FDA monitor levels, the absence of a strict, universal limit means consistent protection for consumers is not guaranteed, placing a heavy

responsibility on individual vigilance.

An even more direct threat is found in the global market for skin-lightening creams. Mercury, prized for its ability to quickly inhibit melanin and bleach the skin, is sometimes deliberately added to products that promise rapid, dramatic lightening. These creams, often sold online or through informal channels, offer a devastating trade-off. Upon application, mercury doesn't just sit on the surface; it is readily absorbed through the skin, entering the bloodstream and traveling to vital organs like the kidneys, liver, and brain. The damage is progressive and severe, moving beyond skin rashes and discoloration to potential neurological harm, including tremors and memory issues, and even kidney failure.

Understanding this risk reframes the very idea of a beauty ritual. It becomes an act not just of self-care, but of self-preservation. By choosing products with care and advocating for stronger, clearer global standards, we can ensure that the pursuit of beauty nurtures our health rather than undermining it from within.



Health Community of West Africa Association Partnership Webinar Spotlights Gold Standard in Lab Testing Accuracy and Patient Safety

The accuracy and reliability of medical diagnostic test results play a pivotal role in effective disease diagnosis, treatment decisions, and patient prognosis. In respect to this the Health Community of West Africa Association in collaboration its dignified French partners the Association of Biomedical Engineers from Côte d'Ivoire, (ABIO CI) jointly co-organized a webinar to educate health professionals in Efficient Medical Equipment Calibration.

Held on 6th February, 2026 via zoom, the webinar shed light on the growing use of Artificial Intelligence to automate and verify the accuracy of calibration procedures for diagnostic and therapeutic devices.

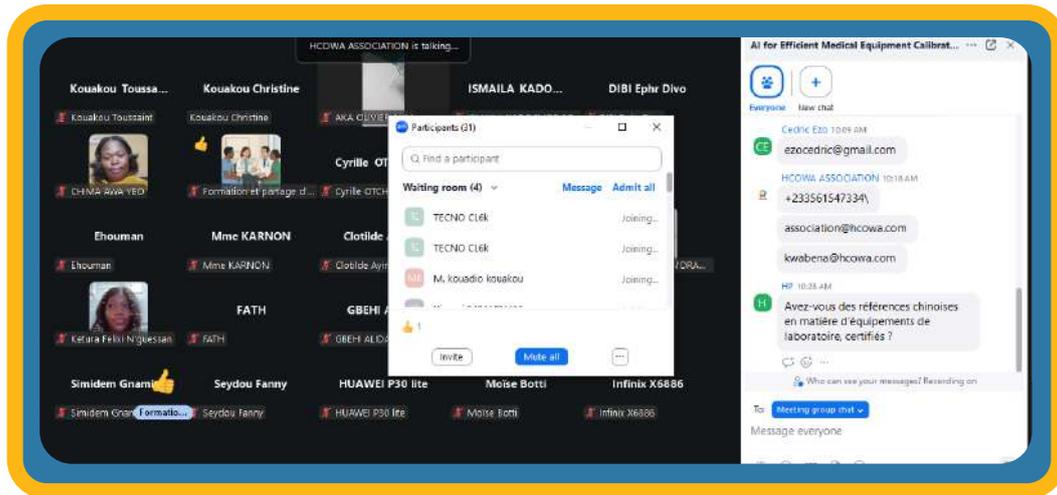
Speakers at the webinar included Dr. Yang, CEO of Canyu Tech, who delivered an insightful presentation emphasizing the rigorous, multi-layered quality assurance systems that underpin trustworthy laboratory testing.

Modern medical laboratories implement a

comprehensive whole-process quality control system spanning pre-analysis, analysis, and post-analysis phases. Pre-analysis quality control often the most error-prone stage focuses on patient preparation (e.g., proper fasting or medication pauses), correct specimen collection using appropriate containers and anticoagulants, timely and temperature-controlled transportation, and initial laboratory checks for issues like hemolysis or clotting. Unqualified specimens are rejected to prevent inaccurate results.

During the analytical phase, laboratories adhere to standardized operating procedures (SOPs), maintain and calibrate instruments regularly, validate new reagents, and conduct daily indoor quality control (IQC) using known-concentration control materials. Results are plotted on Levey-Jennings charts and evaluated with rules like Westgard criteria. Out of control results halt patient reporting until issues (e.g., reagent or operator errors) are resolved. Staff competency is ensured through certification,





ongoing training, and assessments.

Post-analysis involves senior review for clinical reasonableness, immediate reporting of critical values (e.g., extreme potassium levels), and explanations to support clinical interpretation.

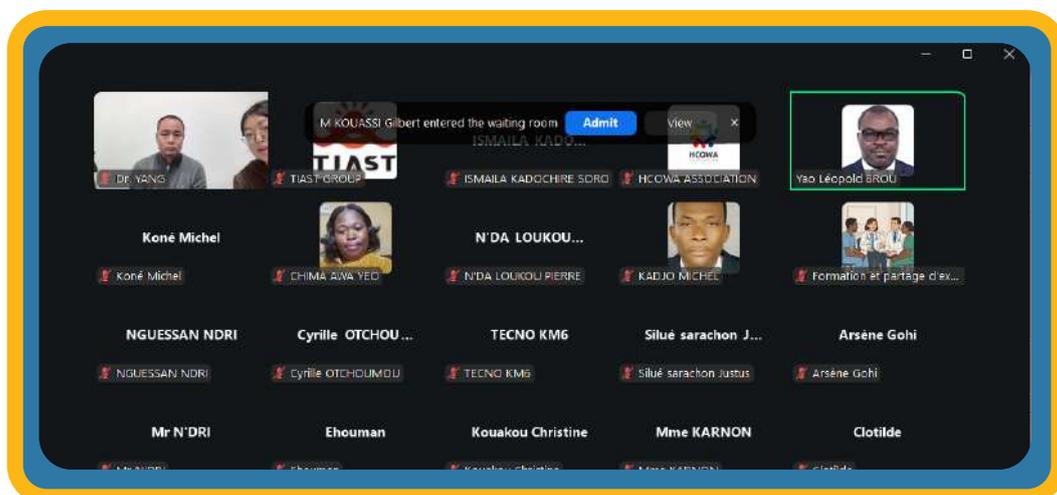
External oversight strengthens reliability through External Quality Assessment (EQA) or Proficiency Testing (PT), where unknown samples from national bodies are tested blindly and compared across labs. Laboratory accreditation to ISO 15189 the international standard for medical laboratory quality and competence represents the gold standard, required for many top-tier facilities (including in China's Grade III hospitals) and enabling global mutual recognition. Administrative inspections further enforce compliance.

Dr. Yang highlighted that credible test reports stem from this integrated internal-external system: daily IQC, regular EQA participation, and ISO 15189 audits. Patients are advised to prioritize accredited hospitals or independent labs, interpret results

alongside clinical symptoms (accounting for biological variation and measurement uncertainty), and consult clinicians for comprehensive diagnosis. Retesting at different accredited sites can resolve doubts.

This presentation underscores the scientific rigor behind modern diagnostics, fostering greater trust in laboratory medicine across regions like West Africa through international collaborations and best practices.

President of ABIO-CI, BROU Yao Léopold, a Biomedical Engineer also expressed sincere gratitude to Health Community of West Africa Association and its Chinese partners for organizing such an impactful webinar which will go a long way to enhance healthcare in the West African sub region. Arrangements are underway for more of such training projects as the Health Community of West Africa Association is passionate about projects that enhance healthcare.



Study Finds Cancer Causing Chemicals in Everyday Beauty Items

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

A study has revealed a concerning link between everyday beauty products and exposure to a known cancer-causing chemical. Research focusing on Black and Latina women in Los Angeles found that more than half of the participants regularly used personal-care items containing formaldehyde or formaldehyde-releasing preservatives.

Published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*, the study asked 64 women to document every product they used at home for one week—from soap and lotion to shampoo, conditioners, and makeup. The results showed that 53% of the women used at least one product containing these toxic agents.

Formaldehyde is classified as a human carcinogen and is also linked to skin irritation and respiratory problems. In beauty products, it is often not listed plainly as “formaldehyde” on labels but appears under chemical names like DMDM hydantoin, making it difficult for consumers to identify.

“This is really concerning,” said lead author Robin Dodson, associate director of research at the Silent Spring Institute, a nonprofit focused on environmental links to breast cancer. “We are intentionally putting chemicals that release a carcinogen into products we apply every day.”



The study also highlighted the sheer volume of products used, with participants applying an average of 17 different items daily. This frequent and varied use increases potential exposure.

Researchers chose to focus on Black and Latina women because prior studies indicate they are disproportionately exposed to formaldehyde, often through hair straighteners and relaxers. This exposure may contribute to stark health disparities, including higher mortality rates from breast, uterine, and ovarian cancers among Black women.

"There has to be a regulatory solution," Dodson stated, calling for ingredient bans. Co-author Janette Robinson Flint of Black Women for Wellness emphasized, "We shouldn't have to be chemists to figure out what kinds of products will make us sick."

While the European Union banned formaldehyde in cosmetics in 2009, U.S. federal regulation has lagged. Although some states have recently passed laws limiting its use, advocates argue stronger and more consistent federal action is urgently needed to protect public health.

For now, experts advise consumers to carefully read ingredient labels and avoid products listing formaldehyde-releasing preservatives, while continuing to push for systemic change in the regulation of personal-care products.

Source: NPR



Understanding Penile Cancer

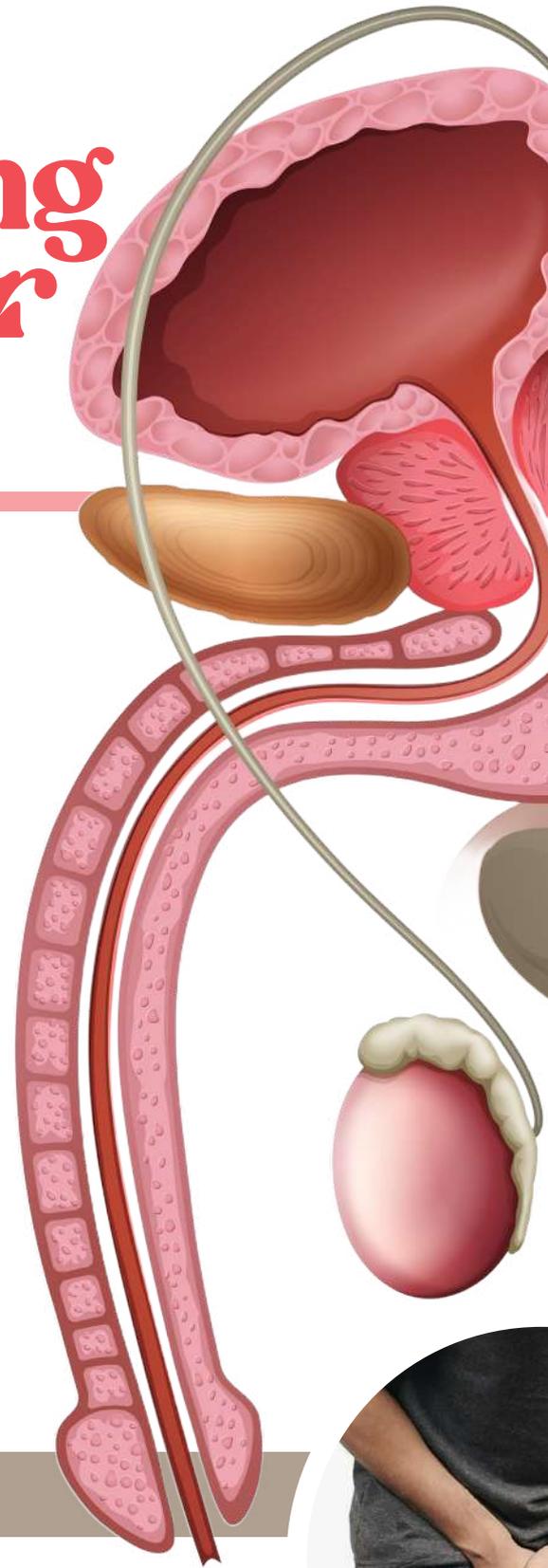
By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

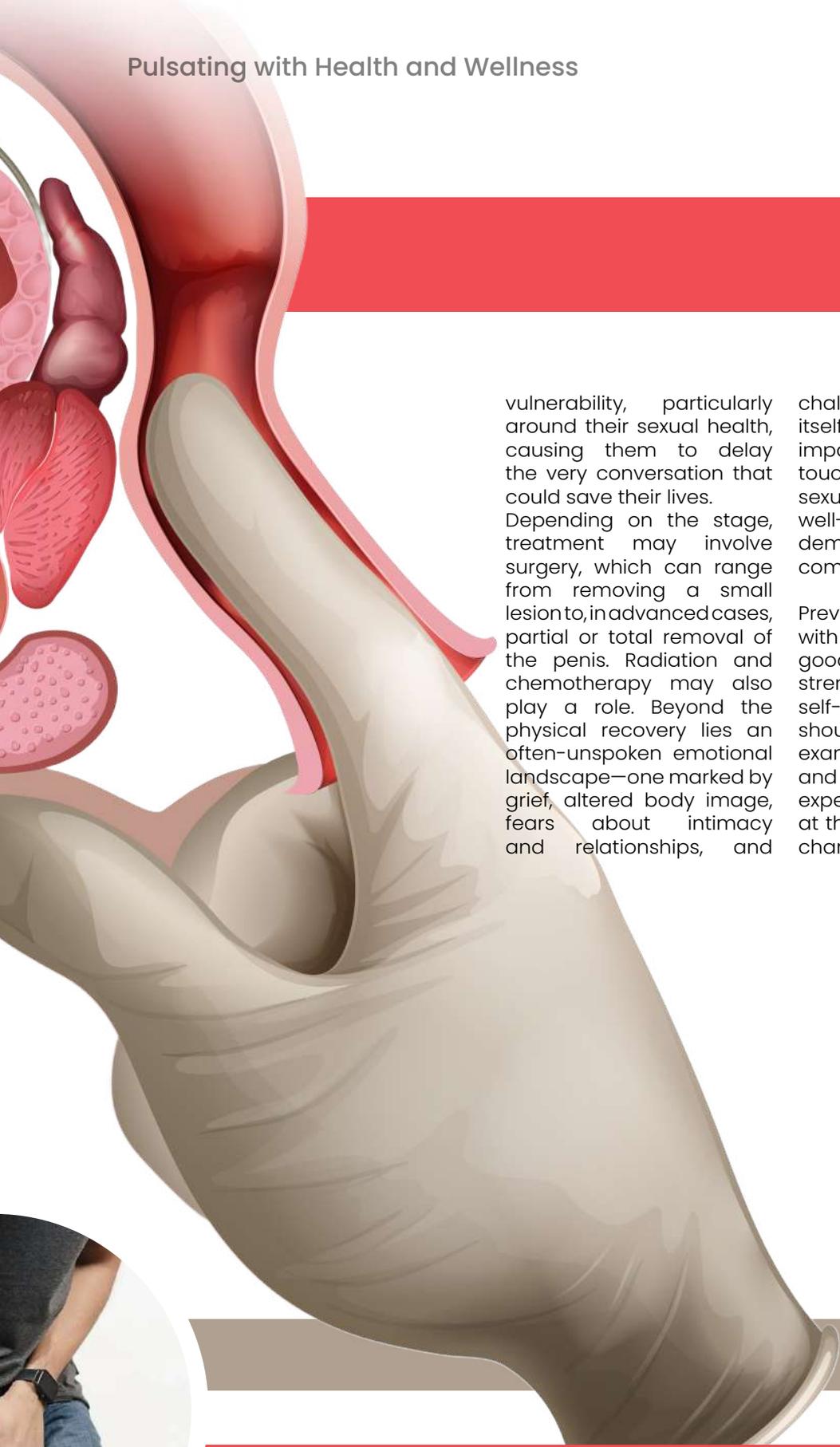
Penile cancer develops through the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the tissues of the penis. Its relative rarity can, paradoxically, become one of its greatest risks. Because it is uncommon, both men and sometimes healthcare providers may not immediately consider it, allowing early signs to be overlooked or dismissed. Yet when caught early, treatment is often highly effective and less invasive, offering a strong chance at recovery while preserving function and form.

Several factors can increase a man's risk, and awareness of them is a crucial part of prevention. Infection with certain strains of the human papillomavirus, or HPV, is a significant and preventable

cause, highlighting the importance of HPV vaccination for boys and young men—a vaccine that protects against multiple cancers. Other contributing factors include a condition called phimosis, where the foreskin becomes too tight to retract, leading to chronic irritation; poor hygiene; smoking; and increasing age, with most diagnoses occurring after age fifty.

The symptoms themselves—a persistent sore, an unusual lump, a change in skin color or texture, bleeding, or a foul-smelling discharge—are clear in a clinical sense. But the path from noticing a change to seeking help is often clouded by embarrassment, shame, or a fear of judgment. Many men are socialized to avoid





vulnerability, particularly around their sexual health, causing them to delay the very conversation that could save their lives. Depending on the stage, treatment may involve surgery, which can range from removing a small lesion to, in advanced cases, partial or total removal of the penis. Radiation and chemotherapy may also play a role. Beyond the physical recovery lies an often-unspoken emotional landscape—one marked by grief, altered body image, fears about intimacy and relationships, and

challenges to masculinity itself. The psychological impact can be severe, touching on identity, sexuality, and mental well-being in ways that demand compassionate, comprehensive support.

Prevention begins with vaccination and good hygiene, and is strengthened by regular self-awareness. Men should feel empowered to examine their own bodies and to seek a urologist's expertise without shame at the first sign of a lasting change.



Cancer



By Marilyn Tiphaine Fifame

Cancer is a complex group of diseases characterised by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. It can arise in almost any part of the body and remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide, contributing to nearly one in five deaths globally. Today, cancer represents not just a medical condition, but a growing public health challenge that affects families, communities, and national health systems.

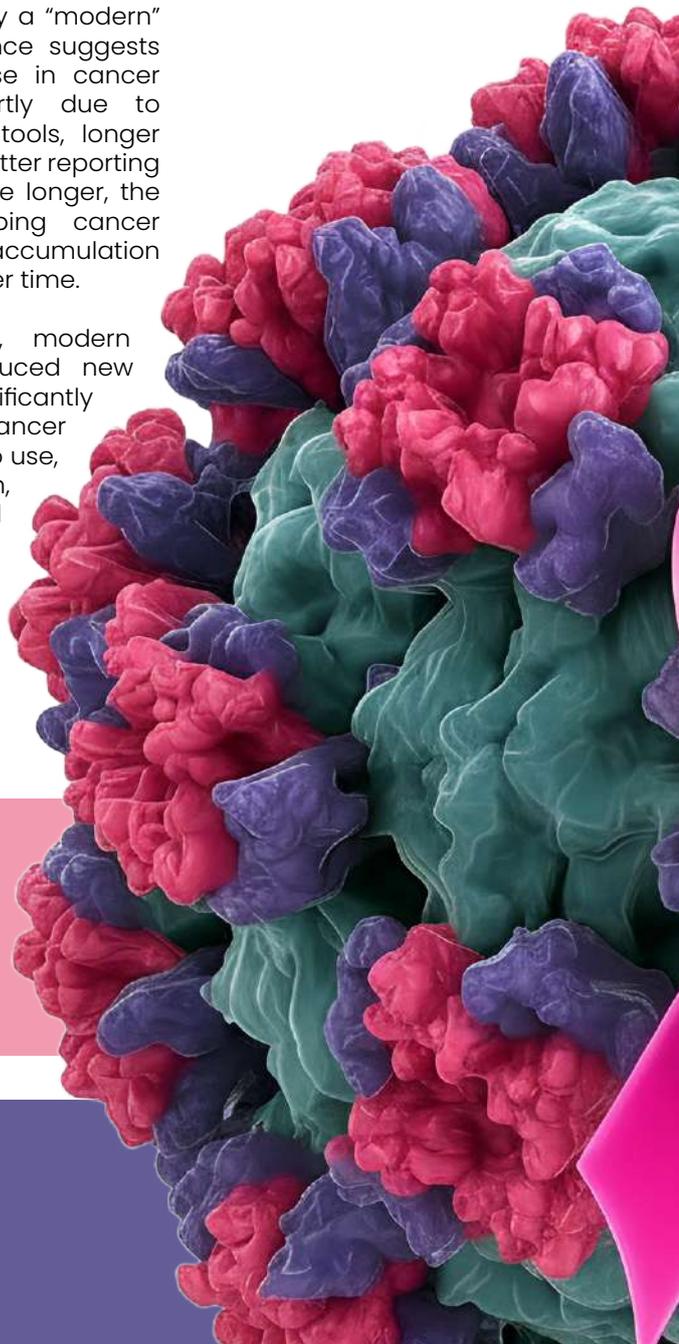
Although cancer has existed throughout human history, early civilizations often misunderstood the disease, attributing it to spiritual or supernatural causes. Ancient medical records from Egypt and Greece describe tumours, but limited scientific knowledge and shorter life expectancy meant that cancer cases were rarely identified or properly documented. Modern science, however, has transformed cancer from a mysterious illness into a biologically understood disease

driven by cellular and genetic changes.

Is Cancer a Modern Disease?

Scientists continue to debate whether cancer is truly a “modern” disease. Some evidence suggests that the apparent rise in cancer cases today is partly due to improved diagnostic tools, longer life expectancy, and better reporting systems. As people live longer, the likelihood of developing cancer increases due to the accumulation of cellular damage over time.

At the same time, modern lifestyles have introduced new risk factors that significantly contribute to cancer development. Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, environmental pollution, poor diet, physical inactivity, industrial chemicals, and radiation exposure all increase



cancer risk. These factors have transformed cancer into not only a biological disease but also a lifestyle- and environment-driven condition.

The Complex Causes of Cancer

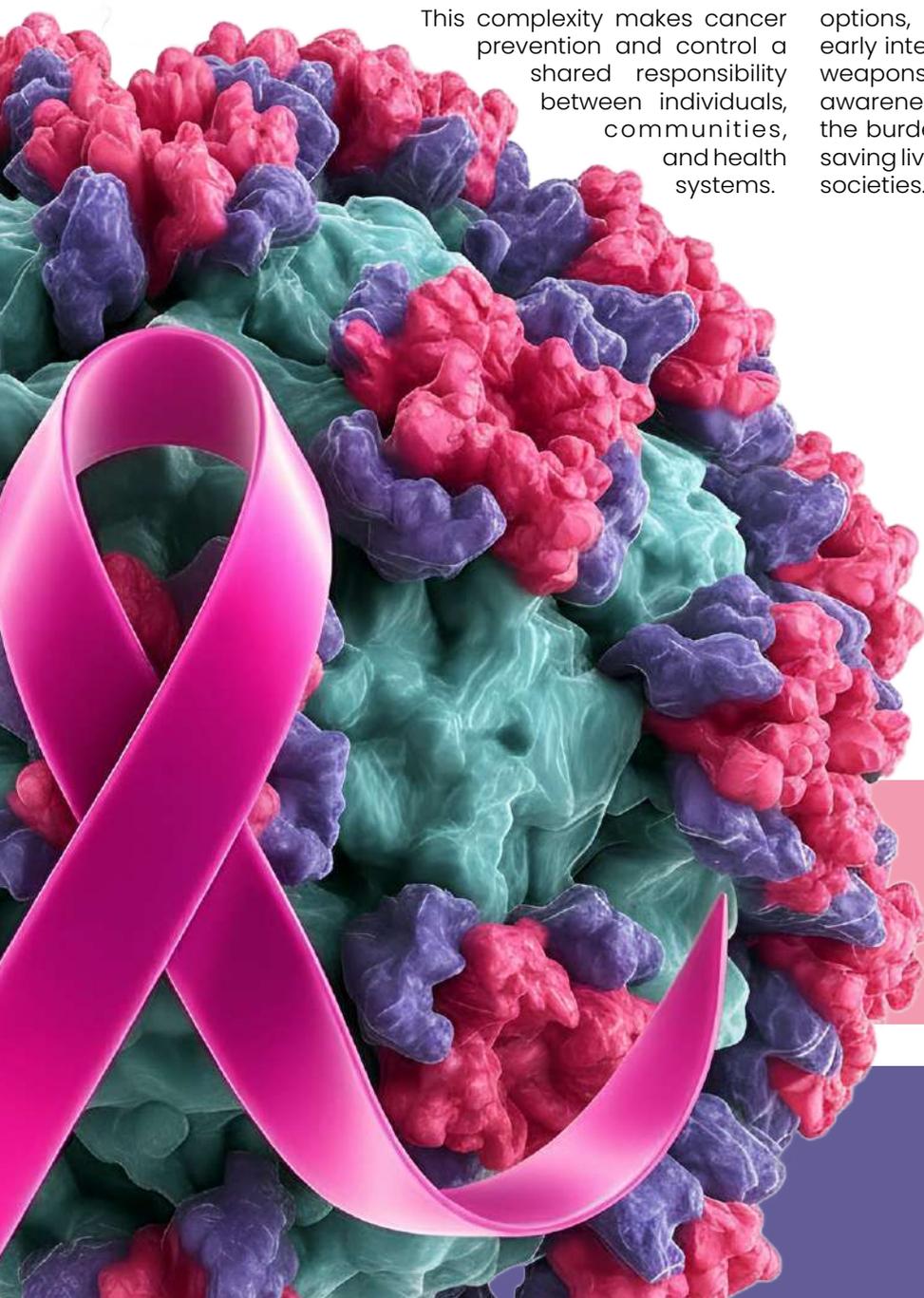
Cancer does not have a single cause. It results from a complex interaction between genetics, environmental exposures, lifestyle choices, infections, and ageing. Some cancers are linked to infectious agents such as the human papillomavirus (HPV) in cervical cancer, while others are influenced by environmental exposure, such as ultraviolet radiation in skin cancer.

This complexity makes cancer prevention and control a shared responsibility between individuals, communities, and health systems.

Prevention, Awareness, and the Way Forward

Despite its complexity, cancer is increasingly preventable. Lifestyle changes, vaccination programmes (such as HPV vaccination), early screening, and public health education remain powerful tools in reducing cancer risk. Early detection significantly improves survival rates and quality of life, making awareness campaigns and community sensitisation essential.

Understanding cancer as both an ancient and modern disease highlights a critical truth: while science continues to advance treatment options, prevention, education, and early intervention remain our strongest weapons. With the right policies, public awareness, and access to healthcare, the burden of cancer can be reduced, saving lives and strengthening healthier societies.



UN Study Reveals Nearly 40% of Global Cancer Cases Could be Prevented

A new report from the United Nations World Health Organization has delivered a powerful and hopeful message in the global fight against cancer: nearly four in ten cancer cases worldwide are preventable. Released on the eve of World Cancer Day, the study identifies clear, actionable steps that governments and individuals can take to avert millions of diagnoses and save countless lives.

The research, a collaboration between the WHO and its International Agency for Research on Cancer, provides the most detailed global analysis to date of cancer's preventable causes. For the first time, the study integrates nine cancer-causing infections—such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and hepatitis B—alongside long-recognized risks like tobacco, alcohol, air pollution, and unhealthy diets. The data paints a clear picture: in 2022 alone, approximately 7.1 million new cancer cases, representing 37 percent of the global total, were directly linked to these modifiable factors.

Tobacco use stands out as the single largest driver, responsible for 15 percent of all new cancer cases globally. Infections follow as the second leading cause, accounting for 10 percent of cases, with alcohol consumption contributing another 3 percent. The most common preventable cancers—lung, stomach, and cervical—highlight distinct pathways to prevention, from quitting smoking and improving air quality to receiving vaccinations and treating bacterial infections.

The report reveals significant disparities in



how these risks affect different populations. Men bear a substantially higher burden, with 45 percent of their cancer cases linked to preventable causes, compared to 30 percent for women. Smoking accounts for nearly a quarter of all cancer cases in men, while in women, infections like HPV are the leading preventable risk. These patterns also shift dramatically across regions, influenced by local exposure, socioeconomic development, and the strength of national health policies.

Dr. André Ilbawi, WHO Team Lead for Cancer Control and an author of the study, emphasized that these findings are a call for targeted action. "By examining patterns across countries and

population groups, we can provide governments and individuals with more specific information to help prevent many cancer cases before they start," he stated.

The WHO stresses that reversing the current trajectory—which forecasts a 50 percent surge in new cancer cases by 2040—requires coordinated, cross-sector strategies. These include enforcing strong tobacco and alcohol control measures, ensuring widespread access to vaccinations against HPV and hepatitis B.

Source: UN News



Turmeric Veggie Power Bowl

This meal is rich in fiber, plant antioxidants, healthy fats, and spices like turmeric that may help reduce inflammation and oxidative stress.

Ingredients

1 cup broccoli florets
1 medium carrot, sliced
1 cup spinach or kale
½ cup cooked brown rice or quinoa
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ teaspoon turmeric powder
1 small clove garlic, minced
¼ teaspoon black pepper (important for turmeric absorption)
Salt to taste
Optional: 1 tablespoon crushed peanuts or pumpkin seeds

Simple Preparation

1. Steam or lightly sauté the broccoli and carrots for 3–5 minutes until just tender.
2. Add garlic, turmeric, black pepper, and olive oil. Stir gently for 1 minute.
3. Toss in spinach or kale and cook briefly until wilted.
4. Serve over warm brown rice or quinoa.
5. Top with nuts or seeds if using.



Family Health and Cancer: Building Stronger Defenses Together

By Marilyn Tiphaine Fifame

Cancer is often seen as an individual battle, but in reality, it is a family health issue. A cancer diagnosis affects not only the patient but also parents, children, partners, and caregivers. Families play a critical role in prevention, early detection, treatment support, and emotional healing. By working together, families can reduce cancer risks and improve outcomes when cancer occurs.

One of the most powerful ways families can fight cancer is through healthy lifestyle choices. Shared habits such as eating balanced meals rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes help lower the risk of several cancers. Limiting processed foods, sugary drinks, alcohol, and tobacco use is equally important. When healthy eating and physical activity become family routines like walking together or cooking nutritious meals these habits are more likely to last a lifetime.

Early detection is another area where family involvement matters. Encouraging loved ones to attend regular health check-ups, cancer screenings, and vaccinations can save lives. Screenings for breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal cancers help identify disease at an early stage,

when treatment is more effective. Families should also share medical histories openly, as some cancers have hereditary links that may increase risk for relatives.

When a family member is diagnosed with cancer, emotional and practical support becomes essential. Cancer treatment can be physically exhausting and emotionally overwhelming. Families can help by attending medical appointments, assisting with daily tasks, and offering reassurance. Simple acts like listening, spending time together, and maintaining hope can significantly improve a patient's quality of life and mental well-being.

Caregivers must also protect their own health. Supporting someone with cancer can lead to stress, fatigue, and burnout. Families should share caregiving responsibilities, seek community or professional support when needed, and prioritize rest and self-care.

Ultimately, a family that values prevention, awareness, and compassion creates a strong foundation against cancer. By fostering healthy habits, encouraging early detection, and standing together during illness, families not only help reduce cancer risks but also build resilience, unity, and long-term well-being for generations to come.



Can Cervical Cancer Really Be Prevented?



Josephine Awuah
(Midwife – Oda Government Hospital)

Cervical cancer remains one of the most preventable cancers affecting women, yet myths and misinformation continue to stop many women from seeking screening and treatment. As a midwife working closely with women in antenatal clinics and community outreach, I frequently hear fears and beliefs that can delay life-saving care.

Let's separate myths from facts and understand what every woman should know.

Myth: Cervical cancer is caused by witchcraft or curses.

Truth: It is caused by HPV, a virus – not spiritual forces./

Myth: Only promiscuous women get cervical cancer.

Truth: Any sexually active woman can get HPV, even with one partner.

Myth: Married or faithful women are protected.

Truth: HPV can be passed unknowingly. Marriage does not eliminate risk.

Myth: Pregnancy prevents cervical cancer.

Truth: Cancer can occur during pregnancy, which is why screening matters.

Myth: Screening causes miscarriage or infertility.

Truth: Pap smears, HPV tests, and visual inspection are safe and do not affect fertility.

Myth: Screening is only needed when symptoms appear.

Truth: Early cervical cancer often has no symptoms. Screening detects problems before pain or bleeding begins.

Myth: The HPV vaccine causes infertility or encourages early sex.

Truth: The vaccine is safe and protects against cervical cancer.

Myth: A cervical cancer diagnosis means death.

Truth: When detected early, cervical cancer is highly treatable and often curable.

Myth: Surgery or biopsy spreads cancer.

Truth: Medical procedures help diagnose and treat disease they do not spread it.

Myth: Family planning causes cervical cancer.

Truth: Cervical cancer is linked to persistent HPV infection, not contraception.

Myth: Traditional herbs alone can cure cervical cancer.

Truth: Herbs may ease symptoms, but medical treatment is essential to cure the disease.

Why some women distrust hospital treatment?

In many communities, women believe cervical cancer cannot be treated in hospital. This often comes from witnessing patients arrive very late, when the disease is advanced. When outcomes are poor, families may assume treatment failed when in fact, early detection could have changed the story. Seeing someone undergo surgery or chemotherapy and still pass away can reinforce fear, but modern treatment is most effective when cancer is found early.

The message every woman should hear

Cervical cancer is preventable and treatable.

- Get screened regularly
- Vaccinate girls against HPV
- Seek care early
- Trust evidence-based medical treatment

Early action saves lives. As midwives, our goal is to guide women with accurate information so they can protect their health and their future. If you have questions or fears about screening or vaccination, speak to a trusted healthcare provider. Knowledge is one of the strongest tools we have against cervical cancer.



Supporting Mind and Body After a Cancer Diagnosis

By Marilyn Tiphaine Fifame

A cancer diagnosis is not only a physical health challenge it is a profound emotional and psychological experience that affects patients and their families alike. Studies show that between 35–45% of people diagnosed with cancer experience significant emotional distress, including fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and depression. For many, life changes suddenly, creating feelings of loss of control, confusion, and vulnerability.

Beyond the medical impact, cancer disrupts a person's sense of stability and meaning. Patients often struggle to understand their diagnosis, treatment options, and future outlook. This emotional uncertainty can deepen psychological suffering, especially when support systems and clear information are lacking. Health professionals increasingly recognize that healing must address not only the disease, but also the emotional resilience of the patient.

One important concept in cancer wellness care is the Sense of Coherence (SOC) a psychological framework based on three elements: meaningfulness, manageability, and comprehensibility. When patients can understand their condition, find meaning in their experience, and feel supported in managing challenges, they are better able to cope with the emotional burden of illness. Research shows that strong coping skills and psychological growth after diagnosis can significantly reduce depressive symptoms and improve mental wellbeing.

Cancer treatment itself also brings serious physical and emotional challenges. Symptoms such as pain, fatigue, nausea, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, and anxiety often affect quality of life. Among these, fatigue is one of the most common and unmanaged symptoms, especially during chemotherapy and radiotherapy. This exhaustion can limit daily activity and worsen emotional distress.

Health and wellness interventions play a critical role in recovery and resilience. Simple, structured physical activity such as supervised walking programs has been proven to reduce fatigue, improve physical strength, and enhance emotional wellbeing during treatment.

Exercise not only supports the body but also restores confidence, independence, and a sense of control.

True cancer wellness care must go beyond medicine. Emotional support, clear communication, psychological care, physical activity, and family involvement are essential parts of healing. By creating supportive environments that promote coping, resilience, and hope, healthcare systems can help patients move from survival to recovery strengthening both mental and physical wellbeing throughout the cancer journey.



Key Health Terms Related to Cancer

Tumor

A mass of tissue formed when cells grow and divide abnormally, which can be cancerous or non-cancerous.

Malignant

Describes cancer cells that grow aggressively and can invade nearby tissues or spread to other parts of the body.

Benign

A non-cancerous growth that does not spread to other areas of the body and is usually less harmful.

Metastasis

The process by which cancer cells spread from the original site to distant organs through the blood or lymph system.

Chemotherapy

The use of powerful medicines to destroy cancer cells or stop them from growing and dividing.

Radiotherapy

A cancer treatment that uses high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors.

Biopsy

A medical procedure in which a small sample of tissue is removed from the body and examined to confirm cancer.

Screening

Health tests performed on people without symptoms to detect cancer early, when treatment is more effective.

Remission

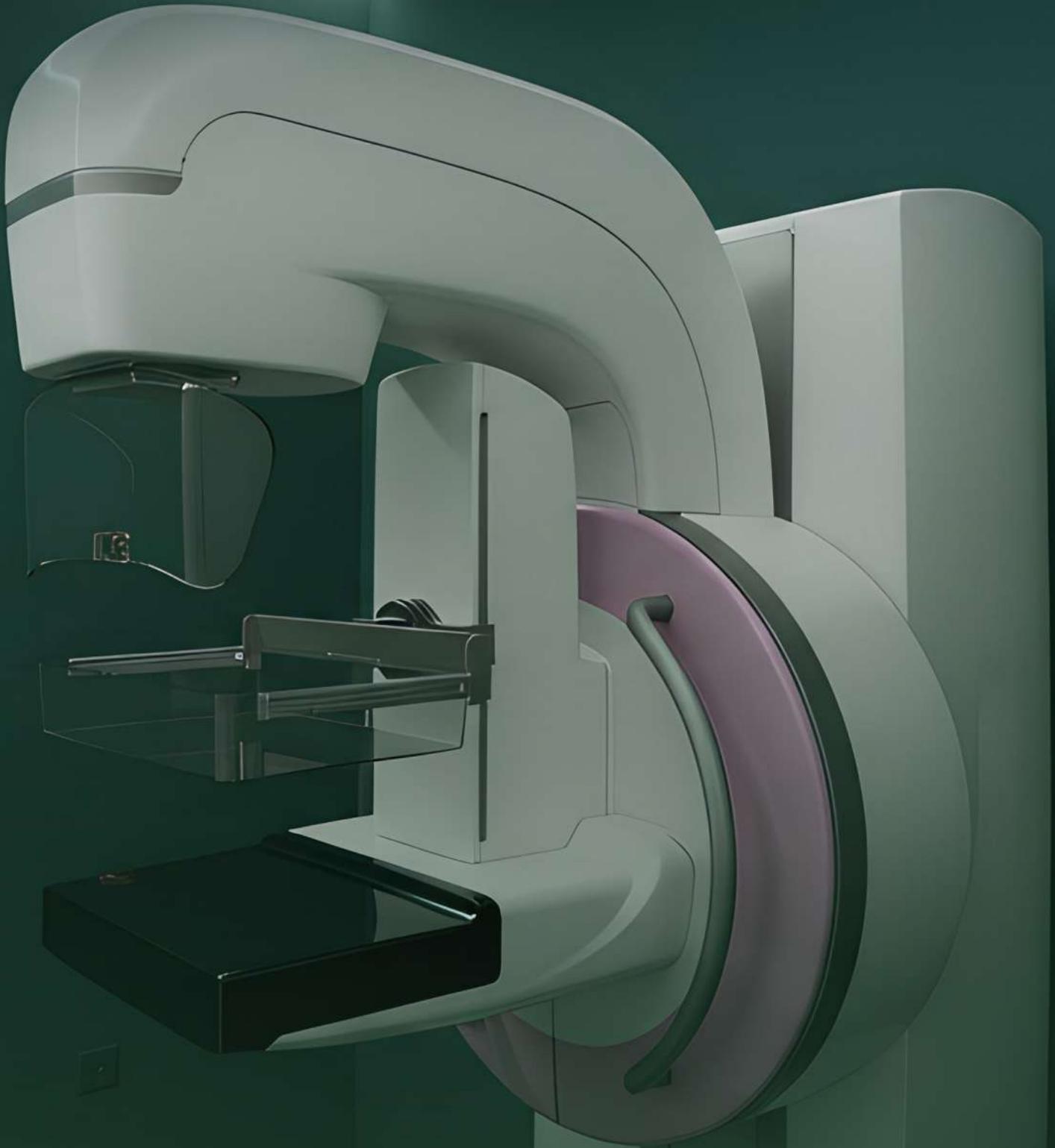
A period during which signs and symptoms of cancer are reduced or no longer detectable after treatment.

Oncology

The branch of medicine focused on the diagnosis, treatment, and care of people with cancer.

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