



## MYTH 01

### WE DON'T NEED TO TALK ABOUT CANCER

**Truth:** Whilst cancer can be a difficult topic to address, particularly in some cultures and settings, dealing with the disease openly can improve outcomes at an individual, community and policy level.



#### WHEN YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS CANCER

##### Talking about Cancer

###### Evidence

- For most people, a diagnosis of cancer is a life-changing event commonly evoking feelings of shock, fear, anger, sadness, loneliness and anxiety. Talking about cancer to partners, family members, friends and colleagues can help to alleviate these feelings, and yet many people find it difficult.
- In most settings, cancer remains taboo and people with cancer are even subject to stigma and discrimination that may stop them from seeking care.
- Negative public perception of cancer can stifle informed public discussion and perpetuate a cycle of fear and misinformation that hinders raising awareness about cancer prevention and the importance of early detection. Countering cultural barriers against speaking about cancer and contesting misinformation is therefore essential.
- Even within highly engaged communities, the level of knowledge of cancer and the willingness to talk about it with friends and family can be low.
- There are campaigns that specifically challenge the taboos and embarrassment surrounding some male cancers (prostate, testicular and colorectal cancers) and create awareness of early signs and symptoms.

---

## Cancer caregiving and support

### Evidence

- Cancer caregiving can also have an enormous influence on both physical and mental health. Cancer carers – most commonly partners, family members or friends – often receive little information or support, and as a consequence many of them experience emotional distress, leading to depression in some cases.
- Providing the right support for the person living with cancer can help them cope and improve their quality of life.
- Support groups can provide a caring and supportive environment for people living with cancer to express their feelings and reduce anxiety and fear. They also provide a space to share information about cancer treatment options and their side effects.

## Cancer and the Workplace

### Evidence

- In low resource settings, the costs of cancer can be catastrophic for families, with the high costs of cancer treatment and absence from work, impoverishing families.
- A return to work is an important step in restoring stability, social contact and income. For both patients and their carers, receiving support in the workplace can be of great benefit. A supportive approach from employers can reduce anxiety and provide the skills and confidence to deal with cancer at work.

---

## Cancer, Body Image and Sexual Wellbeing

### Evidence

- The impact on sexual wellbeing is, for many, one of the most devastating consequences of a cancer diagnosis.
- Issues of body image and sexuality can have a significant impact on partner relationships and in some cases can be the cause of partner rejection. These issues are not restricted to women. Men facing cancer, particularly prostate and testicular cancer, also face issues around self-esteem and sexual intimacy.



### Global Advocacy Message

Talking about cancer can help to challenge negative beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate myths, cause fear and stigma, and prevent people from seeking early detection and treatment.

Governments, communities, employers and media all have a role to play in changing perceptions about cancer to create a culture where the physical and mental health and wellbeing of cancer survivors and their carers are addressed and people are empowered to access quality cancer prevention and care.

**“Due to a lack of knowledge, when they hear the word ‘cancer’ they get scared, some hide it and some use traditional medicine until it becomes too late for treatment.”**

A workshop participant from Ethiopia in an interview on beliefs and practices in breast cancer.

---

## The Global Cancer Conversation

### Evidence

- Cancer constitutes a major challenge to development undermining social and economic advances throughout the world. By 2030, developing countries will bear the brunt of the estimated 21.4 million new cancer cases per year. Yet there remains limited political will to include cancer control within a global development framework.
- The staggering risk that cancer poses to economic growth and development is still not recognised despite the fact that we know that this risk can be managed effectively and that a return on investment in health is possible.
- The cost of cancer is estimated to reach USD 458 billion per year in 2030.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that a basic package of cost effective strategies to address the common cancer risk factors (tobacco use and harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity) would cost only USD 2 billion per year.



### Global Advocacy Message

Investing in the prevention and early detection of cancer is cheaper than dealing with the consequences.

Mainstreaming cancer and Non-communicable disease (NCDs) within a global development framework is a critical step to mitigating the social and economic impact of cancer on future generations.

**“Prevention of NCDs including cancer is a precondition for, an outcome of and an indicator of all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion”**

WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (2013-2020)

*The 2014 World Cancer Day campaign has been supported by the Dutch Cancer Society and the King Hussein Cancer Foundation*