



THE SRI LANKA COLLEGE OF ONCOLOGISTS

National Cancer Institute, Maharagama, Sri Lanka.

+94-11-2745474 | info@slco.lk | www.slco.lk

25th January 2025

Media Release

World Cancer Day 2025: United by Unique – Shaping a Future of Compassionate Cancer Care in Sri Lanka

Every year on 4th February, the world unites for World Cancer Day, an international movement spearheaded by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) to raise awareness and drive meaningful action against the global cancer epidemic. This year's theme, **“United by Unique,”** highlights a profound truth: cancer is more than just a medical diagnosis—it is a deeply personal journey, woven with stories of courage, hope, and resilience.

In Sri Lanka, where cancer is the second leading cause of death among non-communicable diseases, the message of **“United by Unique”** couldn't be more relevant. According to the National Cancer Registry 2021, over 30,000 new cases are reported annually including over 1000 childhood cancers. Among women, breast cancer accounts for 27.5% of all cancers, while lung and oral cancers lead among men. These figures underscore the urgent need for innovative and equitable cancer care tailored to the unique needs of every individual.

The Path Forward: Prevention, Access, and Equity

While cancer's impact is vast, its burden can be mitigated through proactive measures. SLCO emphasizes the importance of:

- **Prevention:** Tackling major risk factors like tobacco and alcohol use, unhealthy diets, and inadequate physical activity.
- **Early Detection:** Promoting nationwide screening programs, particularly for breast, cervical, and oral cancers.
- **Accessible Treatment:** Bridging the care gap to ensure that no patient is left behind, regardless of location or socioeconomic status.

SLCO applauds the government's commitment to expanding radiotherapy services, with cutting-edge technology expected to be operational in all major centres by year's end. While the decommissioning of outdated machines takes place in phases, SLCO is collaborating with the Ministry of Health to minimize service disruptions and maintain continuity of care.

Collaboration for Excellence

Our members, including clinical, surgical, gynaecological, paediatric, and haemato oncologists, are dedicated to delivering world-class care. However, challenges remain, particularly in specialized areas like stem cell transplantation, where limited facilities prevent many eligible patients from accessing treatment. SLCO strongly advocates for developing centres of excellence to provide these advanced therapies and reduce reliance on costly treatments abroad.

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Another critical area is chemotherapy availability. Ensuring a continuous supply of essential cancer therapeutics has been challenging, particularly amidst Sri Lanka's economic crisis. Access has been restricted to the most cost-effective medications, leaving some important drugs, especially those used in palliative care, unavailable in the government sector. These medications, while not curative, significantly improve the quality of life for patients. As the country moves toward economic stability, SLCO hopes the government will prioritize expanding the availability of chemotherapy agents within the universal healthcare system, ensuring comprehensive care for all patients.

Together, We Can Close the Care Gap

World Cancer Day is a powerful reminder that cancer care is a shared responsibility. Whether it's through public awareness, policy advocacy, or advancing medical infrastructure, every effort counts. By joining hands, we can create a future where every Sri Lankan, regardless of their circumstances, has access to compassionate, high-quality cancer care.

This World Cancer Day, let us celebrate resilience, amplify voices, and reimagine a world where we see the person beyond the patient. Together, we are stronger, and together, we can make a difference.

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Consultant Clinical Oncologist
National Cancer Institute of Sri Lanka

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The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists
National Cancer Institute - Maharagama
Sri Lanka

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Secretary

Dr Buddhika Somawardana,
Consultant Haemato Oncologist
National Cancer Institute of Sri Lanka

Secretary
The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists
National Cancer Institute - Maharagama
Sri Lanka

For Further information contact:

Name : Dr Buddhika Somawardana, Secretary, Sri Lanka College of Oncologists

Tel no : 0760830979

Email : buddhikaprabath@yahoo.com