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Cancer in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), cancer kills more than tuberculosis, AIDS and malaria combined. Its prevalence is rising steadily as in the rest of the world. In the West, cancer, the leading cause of death, is responsible for more than half of the deaths, even if it is declining. In 2008, nearly 44% of deaths in hospitals in the DRC were due to cancer according to the Ministry of Health. This steady rise in prevalence concerns chronic noncommunicable diseases, among which cancer takes a large place. Favorable factors include dietary habits, lifestyle changes, etc. In fact, cancer results from the combination of several factors, some of which are preventable, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, exposure to infections such as AIDS, hepatitis B and C, papillomavirus. Exposure to cervical and anal cancer, abuse in the consumption of fats, lack of physical exercise, non-consumption of vegetables and fruits. This world scourge spares no one because of age, sex, race, religion, wealth or poverty. It must be considered as a major public health problem. The most frequent cancers in man affect the lungs, the prostate, the colon; and in the woman, the breasts, the lungs, the colon. On the digestive level, in the DRC, the rise appears to be regular for cancers of the liver, stomach, large intestine, rectum; Perhaps contributing to a life expectancy of the Congolese (51) among the lowest in the world, lower than the African average (56 years), very far from the French figures (78 years for men and 83 years for women). It is estimated that nearly 12.4% of the 804 million people in the African Region will develop cancer before reaching the age of 75 years. The risk increases with age, and 90% of cancer cases will occur after the age of 40 years. If action were taken immediately, there could be an annual saving of some 100,000 lives by 2020. Indeed, two thirds of cancers are curable, provided they organize screening and diagnosis at an early stage, and to benefit from the appropriate treatments. The absence in the DRC of a national cancer registry, statistics and a formal cancer control program is a shortcoming that needs to be corrected quickly. We must therefore work towards a national awareness of the reality of cancer; the commitment of the Ministry of Public Health in the fight against cancer is unavoidable. According to the WHO Regional Director for Africa: "Governments and development partners have a shared responsibility to raise awareness to dispel prejudices and preconceptions about cancer and to promote change in life and behavior related to the risk factors of this disease". There is a need for the DRC to organize care in oncology. This implies: 1. Training of health professionals in the management of cancer; 2. Development of structures adapted to the management of cancer; 3. Information campaigns aimed at the general public; 4. Mobilization of financial resources; 5. Access to anti-cancer drugs, perhaps in the anti-retroviral model for HIV. In conclusion, cancer represents in DRC, an increasingly important cost, in terms of human lives; it becomes urgent to organize its care.

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