

## World Cancer Day 2016

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### Let's talk about cancer with Dr Brighton Chireka

We can. I can.

*"On World Cancer Day, we have an opportunity to collectively examine cancer control strategies to identify winning formulas that will accelerate progress. The goal for all of us is to ensure fewer people develop cancer, more people are successfully treated and that there is a better quality of life for people during treatment and beyond," says **Heather Bryant, VP, Cancer Control, Canadian Partnership Against Cancer***

We all know or have heard of someone who has had cancer. Some are alive and some unfortunately are no longer with us. Cancer is one topic that is not talked about by many people and also is not fully understood . There is a lot of fear of the unknown due to the lack of knowledge . Sometimes people perish because they lack knowledge about cancer. I hope that this article is a first step in addressing some of the educational needs that we all have about this important topic. Information that is covered here is of general nature and the purpose of it is to encourage everyone to go and see their doctor for further medical advice.

I would like to join the campaign by World Cancer Day ( 4th February ) . It is taking place under the tagline 'We can. I can.', World Cancer Day 2016-2018 will explore how everyone – as a collective or as individuals – can do their part to reduce the global burden of cancer. Just as cancer affects everyone in different ways, all people have the power to take various actions to reduce the impact that cancer has on individuals, families and communities.

World Cancer Day is a chance to reflect on what you can do, make a pledge and take action. Whatever you choose to do 'We can. I can.' make a difference to the fight against cancer.

### [World Cancer Day 2016 \(4th February \)](#)

I have chosen to compile this article and circulate it to as many people as possible.

Last year in September I was privileged to receive the **ZIMBABWE NATIONAL CANCER REGISTRY (ZNCR) 2013 ANNUAL REPORT from the ZNCR Registrar Mr E Chokunonga**. This report comes barely 10 months after the release of the 2012 report . I must commend the ZNCR for working so hard to effectively clear the reporting backlog and to provide us with a more up-to-date information on the incidence and pattern of occurrence of cancer in Zimbabwe. I am passionate about cancer as I have lost very close relatives from Cancer of the Gallbladder, Cancer of the Prostate, Kaposi's sarcoma to name a few and I also have very close people that that have suffered from breast cancer as well.

The registry with its limited resources is achieving a lot due to committed and determined leadership by using what it has in its hands. The government must make full use of this resource from the registry and make sure that cancer is fully addressed in Zimbabwe. Avoidable death should not be allowed to happen and this calls for joint working between the government and the population at large. No decisions about the public should be taken without the involvement of that public . If it is for the public then the public must be fully involved from the beginning and must have full ownership of the strategy.

***According to ZNCR the total number of new cases of cancer recorded among Zimbabweans in 2013 is 6548 ( males 42.4 % and females 57.6%). The five most frequently occurring cancers among Zimbabweans of all races were cervical cancer (18%) , Kaposi Sarcoma (10%), Breast cancer (7%) , Prostate cancer (7%) and Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (6%).The leading cause of cancer among Zimbabwe black men in 2013 was prostate cancer followed by Kaposi Sarcoma. In Zimbabwean black women the most common cancer was cervical cancer followed by breast cancer.***

The sad thing from the report is that people are presenting very late when the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. The outcome is very poor when people present to their doctors too late . I hope by compiling this article I am helping in raising awareness on the need to take cancer seriously and see our doctors as soon as possible.

### **How does cancer begin?**

Cancer begins in cells and cells are the body's basic unit of life. Let me expand on what normally happens in our bodies and what can go wrong . The body is made up of many types of cells. These grow and divide in a controlled way to produce more cells that are needed to keep the body healthy. When cells become old or damaged, they die and are replaced with new ones. However,

sometimes this orderly process goes wrong. The genetic material (DNA) of a cell can become damaged or changed, producing mutations that affect normal cell growth and division. When this happens, cells do not die when they should and new cells form when the body does not need them. The extra cells may form a mass of tissue called a tumour . These cancerous cells can invade and destroy surrounding healthy tissue, including organs and spread to other areas, for example cancer of the bowel (tummy) can spread to the liver or lungs. This process of spreading is known as metastasis.

There are over 200 different types of cancer, each with its own methods of diagnosis and treatment. Most cancers are named for the organ or type of cell in which they start - for example, cancer that begins in the colon is called colon cancer; cancer that begins in melanocytes of the skin is called melanoma and cancer that begins in breast is called breast cancer.

Cancer is a common condition and in some countries such as UK it is estimated that more than one in three people will develop some form of cancer during their lifetime. In the UK, the most common types of cancer are: breast ,prostate, lung, bowel ,bladder ,uterine (womb) cancer.

It's important to know your body and recognise any changes, such as lumps or unexplained bleeding, and to get advice about whether they might be serious.

There are so many symptoms associated with cancer and I do not have the space to include them all and the article will be too long to read. I would advice you to see your GP ( doctor ) if you have some of these symptoms listed in this article. Please remember that these symptoms are often caused by other, non-cancerous illnesses, so it does not mean having these symptoms is a sign of cancer, but it is important you see your GP so they can investigate.

**Other potential signs and symptoms of cancer are outlined below.**

***1-See your GP if you notice a lump in your breast, or if you have a lump that is rapidly increasing in size elsewhere on your body.***

***2- You should visit your GP if you have had a cough for more than three weeks.***

***3- Go to see your GP if you have experienced one of the changes listed below and it has lasted for more than a few weeks: blood in your stools, diarrhoea or constipation for no obvious reason, a feeling of not having fully emptied your bowels after going to the toilet, pain in your abdomen (tummy) or your anus (back passage) and persistent bloating***

***4- You should also go to see your GP if you have any unexplained bleeding such as: blood in your urine, bleeding between periods, blood from your back passage, blood when you cough, blood in your vomit***

***5-Go to see your GP if you have a mole (skin lesion) that: has an irregular or asymmetrical shape, has an irregular border with jagged edges, has more than one colour (it may be flecked with brown, black, red, pink or white), is bigger than 7mm in diameter, is itchy, crusting or bleeding, Any of the above changes means that there is a chance you have malignant melanoma (skin cancer).***

***6- You should also go to see your GP if you have lost a lot of weight over the last couple of***

***months that cannot be explained by changes to your diet, exercise or stress.***

There are no proven ways to prevent cancer, but you can reduce your risk of getting it. There are some cancer risk factors we can't do anything about, such as our age, family history and medical history. The aim of this article is to highlight some of the things we can do something about, for example leading a healthy lifestyle can help lower your risk of developing certain cancers. You can do this by: eating a healthy balanced diet, maintaining a healthy weight, drinking less alcohol, stopping smoking, protecting your skin from sun damage.

We are slowly becoming obese and In England, over 60% of the population is overweight or obese. Being overweight or obese can increase your risk of some cancers, such as: bowel cancer, pancreatic cancer, oesophageal cancer, breast cancer if you are a woman who has been through the menopause, cancer of the womb (uterus) and kidney cancer. Being a healthy weight can reduce your risk of developing cancer so let's start losing weight today!

**Drinking alcohol is known to increase your risk of some cancers, including:**

mouth cancer, pharynx and larynx cancer, oesophageal cancer, colorectal cancer in men and breast cancer. Drinking is probably a cause of other cancers such as colorectal cancer in women and liver cancer. Women shouldn't regularly drink more than 2-3 units of alcohol a day, and men shouldn't regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day. "Regularly" means every day or on most days of the week.

**Lung cancer** is responsible for around a quarter of cancer deaths in the UK, and 90% of lung cancer cases are related to smoking. We know that stopping smoking greatly cuts the risk of developing cancer and the earlier one stops, the greater the impact. But it's never too late to quit. People who quit smoking at 30 live nearly as long as non-smokers, and those who quit at 50 can still undo half the damage." There is support to help you stop smoking so take advantage of it and quit smoking today!

Each specific type of cancer has its own set of treatment methods. However, many cases of cancer are treated using chemotherapy (powerful cancer-killing medication) and radiotherapy (the controlled use of high energy X-rays). Surgery is also sometimes carried out to remove cancerous tissue. Early diagnosis of cancer increases the chance of surviving so please do not procrastinate. What are you waiting for? See your GP today please!

You can read about specific cancers below;

[Let's Talk About Cervical Cancer](#)

[Let's Talk About Prostate Cancer](#)

[Let's Talk About Breast Cancer](#)

For more information and support please please click below ;

[The Cancer Association of Zimbabwe](#)

[Cancer Research UK](#)

This is a huge topic and I have tried to summarise it and hope that you have learnt something. Please feel free to share , comment or like this article . The message to take home is that you should see your doctor without delay if this article resonate with you.

This article was compiled by **Dr. Brighton Chireka** who is a GP and a Health Commissioner in South Kent Coast in the United Kingdom. You can contact him at: **info@docbeecee.co.uk** and can read more of his work on his blog at **www.docbeecee.co.uk/blog**

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