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For World Cancer Day, UN stresses early diagnosis to reduce mounting deaths



IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano speaks at World Cancer Day 2012 event. Photo: IAEA/Dean Calma

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Early diagnosis is the key to reducing the nearly eight million deaths caused by cancer across the globe annually, the United Nations World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said today, stressing the importance of screening programmes for healthy people to detect the disease promptly for easier treatment.

To mark [World Cancer Day](#), which is observed on 4 February every year, WHO reminded the world that cancer is responsible for close to 13 per cent of deaths globally, accounting for 7.6 million deaths in 2008.

The theme of this year's Day is 'Together It Is Possible,' with WHO and its partner, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), focusing on screening and vaccination. Increased access to cost-effective vaccinations to prevent infections associated with cancers and cost-effective cancer-screening programmes can help to reduce the number cancer deaths, the agency stressed.

Vaccination is available against cervical cancer, which is caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) and liver cancer, which results from infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV).

The UN International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)), for its part, highlighted the important achievements over the past year in efforts to fight cancer in developing countries, and featured activities of the agency's Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT).

With almost two thirds of all cancer deaths occurring in developing countries, the IAEA supports countries by helping increase patients' access to improved radiotherapy services and by strengthening medical training.

At IAEA headquarters yesterday, Director General Yukiya Amano [said](#) a shortage of about 5,000 radiotherapy machines in low- and middle-income countries means that hundreds of thousands of patients miss out on early diagnosis and treatment that could save their lives.

"PACT, as well as various other departments at the IAEA, have been working hard to try to make radiotherapy services available in all countries," he said.

Launched in 2004, PACT is an IAEA initiative that helps low- and middle-income nations in their efforts to tackle the growing cancer crisis, by raising awareness, assessing needs and mobilizing resources. It builds on IAEA expertise in radiation medicine to help countries develop sustainable and comprehensive cancer control programmes.

Mr. Amano said IAEA is supporting more than 130 projects in cancer diagnosis, management and treatment. Oncology and radiotherapy centres are being established in countries such as Afghanistan, Eritrea and Mozambique, while national capacity in radiotherapy is being strengthened in Albania and Kenya, he added.

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