

The background of the cover is a solid blue color. On the left side, there is a faint, stylized illustration. At the top left, a hand is shown holding a pen, as if writing. Below this, a large gear is depicted, partially overlapping the hand. The gear has several teeth and is rendered in a light blue, semi-transparent style. The overall composition suggests themes of industry, education, and social progress.

Education for Social Transformation

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**EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION**

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Educating Female Adolescents Against Future Pronsess to Cancer Disease

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Abstract

Cancer disease claimed 17.9 million lives of people in 1996, out of which 10.5 million were women of who had cancer either of the breast, cervix, uterus or ovary, arising from peoples engagement in attitudes that predispose them to the disease. The paper therefore stressed the need for female adolescents to be knowledgeable about cancer disease with reference to its types, cause and risk factors, signs and symptoms, preventive behaviour against cancer disease and the need to report themselves to a qualified doctor for early diagnosis and treatment on detection of any signs of cancer disease.

The paper recommended that Ministries of Education at all levels should make health education a compulsory subject in secondary schools where students would be taught various health topics, including cancer disease.

Health Education departments of Ministries of Health and non-governmental organisations should organise cancer education programmes at a regular interval for secondary school students and the general public. This will reduce the morbidity and mortality rate arising from cancer disease.

Introduction

The health status of the people is usually discussed in terms of diseases, which are classified into communicable and non-communicable diseases. Disease is a condition in which the body health is impaired, a departure from a state of health, an alteration of the human body interrupting the performance of vital functions.

Non-communicable disease is a disease that cannot be spread nor transferred from one person to the other through pathogens (Wood de Glanville and Vaughan, 1997). Among these non-communicable diseases are: Arthritis, stroke, chronic bronchitis, asthma, cancer, diabetes and obesity. (Mitchell and Heit 1987).

The word 'cancer' strikes fear into most, if not all mankind. But why? Is it not a disease like others? What has made it so different and so dreaded that no one wants to hear about it (Ejeckam 1986)? Park (1997) defined cancer as a group of diseases characterised by an abnormal growth of cells with the ability to invade adjacent tissues and even distant organs. It could lead to the eventual death of the affected patient if the tumor has progressed beyond the stage when it can successfully be removed. Cancer can occur at any site or tissue of the body and may involve any type of cell.

Cancer occurs when a cell grows independently out of body's control (Apple 2001). Mifflin (1991) stated that there are two types of tumours. The first is the tumour that has limited growth capabilities and will usually remain at the site of origin. It is called a benign tumour, because they do not harm or kill the patient but they can cause pressure, on vital organs, such as brain and often must be removed by surgery. If the tumour has uncontrolled growth, it is considered cancerous and is called a malignant tumour, which is very serious because the cells take the nourishment that regular cells need and it can spread to other parts of the body.

Research has shown that majority of the female adolescent and adult do not have much knowledge about cancer disease. Moronkola and Adegbite (2004) reported that majority of female undergraduate students do not have the knowledge about cancer disease nor of the factors that cause the disease. Emmanuel and James (1997) asserted that female teachers in Benin city have negative attitude towards pap smear test and self breast examination.

Akintola (1999) reported that female commercial sex workers in Lagos metropolis have negative attitude to cancer preventive behaviour. In a study conducted by Mohammed (2001) he found out that teenage girls in Kano municipality have no knowledge of cancer disease nor its causes. Hence, they engage in the attitude of early sexual intercourse, which is one of the associated factors of cervical and ovarian cancer.

In a research conducted by S.A. Famuyiwa (2004) he found out that senior female secondary school students in Ibadan do not have the knowledge of cancer, its causes, signs/symptoms and preventive behaviour.

Omigbodun (2000) affirmed that efforts at increasing public awareness, particularly among young teenage girls about to enter the reproductive age, would go a long way in cutting down morbidity and mortality rates arising from cervical, ovarian, uterus and breast cancer.

In order to change or improve the people's knowledge, attitude and skills in health or health related areas, an intervention in form of health education is usually needed. Filani and Folade (1998) observed that an improvement area of primary prevention of cancer disease is cancer education, which should be directed at high risk groups (female adolescent). Health education according to Sanusi (2003) quoting Tones and Tilford (1994), is an intentional activity which is designed to achieve a positive outcome, by measuring the extent to which

it contributes to favourable changes in health related knowledge, attitudes and skills. The aim of cancer education is to motivate people to identify signs and symptoms of cancer, to seek early diagnosis and treatment and to inculcate cancer preventive behaviour. Hence the importance of this paper, educating female adolescents against future proness to cancer.

How does this abnormal growth (cancer) start?

Normally most tissues in the body undergo 'wear and tear'. These are replaced by the division and multiplication of the reserve basal or any of the immature cells. In the vast majority of cases, this process goes well. However, once in a while something goes wrong and the multiplying cells rather than grow to the similar adult cell, change their character, go out of control and multiply at a very fast rate. Yet they do not usually contribute to the normal function of the tissue in which they grow; instead they crowd out the normal functioning cells, take all the food meant for the normal cells and in time displace, destroy and replace the normal cells. These cells, as they have become now, are useless to the person in whom they are growing.

Who suffer from cancer

Ejeckam (1986) stated that many people, especially in the developing world, have very distorted views on this subject. It is not a secret that some well-placed people, in fact some medically exposed personnel had offered opinions such as "Cancer is rare in Africa", "Cancer does not occur in blacks", "Cancer is a white man's disease". These are very erroneous. Also, divergent views have been exposed on the social class that suffers from cancer. Some people think that it is a disease of the poor, while others believe that it affects only the rich. All these are simply fallacies. The truth is that cancer is no respecter of person, race, tribe, creed or religion. In the U.S.A, very

prominent persons, such as Senator Hubert Humphery, film actor John Wayne and first ladies such as Betty Ford all had cancer. The people afflicted by cancer come from all walks of life. It is important to emphasise that cancer can affect and kill anybody.

Epidemiology of Cancer Disease in Nigeria

WHO (1997) reported that cancer in all forms are causing about 12 percent of death throughout the world. It is the second leading cause of death, next to cardiovascular diseases accounting for 21 percent (2.5million) for all mortality in developed world, while in the developing world, such as Nigeria, cancer ranks third as a cause of death and accounts for 9.5 percent (3.8million) of all death. Out of an estimated total of 51.3million death during 1996 in the world, more than 71million are attributed to cancer. In 1996 there were an estimated 17.9million persons with cancer surviving up to five years after diagnosis. Of these, 10.5million were women; 5.3 million of whom had cancer either of the breast, cervix, uterus or ovary.

Sholanke (1998) stated that cancer is rising in the health agenda of nations throughout the world, including developing countries where there is cancer epidemic. He observed that there is high level of cancer mortality in Nigeria in which about one hundred thousand new cases occur every year, and in the current population projection, it was estimated that in the year 20.0 about half a million cases will occur annually. Breast cancer is the most encountered among females in Nigeria and it is set to become the most important non-communicable disease of the next millennium as hospital based study from Ibadan in 1998 gave an incidence of 33000 new cases a year. This figure may be unreliable because of non-availability and underutilisation of public health facilities, poverty, negative cultural attitudes to women, ignorance and conflict of faith. Hence, the true incidence is probably at least double 33000 cases (Abebamowo, 1998).

Onovoran, Dada and Adewole (1998), stated that of all the gynecological malignancies, carcinoma of the cervix still remain the most common cancer among women in Nigeria today, as over 25,000 new cases are expected annually in the country, and at the University College Hospital Ibadan, 2-5 new cases are seen every week.

Types of Cancer

Generally cancer can be categorised as (i) carcinomas which arises from epityhelia cells lining the internal surface of various organs such as mouth, oesophagus, intestine uterus and skin epithelium (ii) sarcomas which arises from mesodormal cells consisting the various connective tissue, e.g. fibrous tissues and fat (iii) lymphoma and leukaemia arise from the cell of the bone marrow and immune system.

Specific types of cancer that affect females are:

(i) Breast cancer: this is the second most common cancer in Nigerian female. Hitting blow to the breast does not cause breast cancer, nor will fondling or caressing. Breast cancer is not contagious. Breast cancer can be cured but that depends on the stage at which it is diagnosed. It is however advisable that if you notice any abnormalities in the breast do not hesitate to see your doctor.

(ii) Cancer of the cervix is the most common female cancer in most developing African countries and it attacks young and old women. Cancer of the cervix starts in a small focal area of the cervix, and if not removed, will spread upwards to the womb (uterus) and downwards to the vaginal. This may be too late for complete cure because it is now advanced. Cancer of the cervix can be detected by undergoing a pap smear test through a qualified medical practitioner; indeed, any girl that has been engaging in sexual intercourse should undergo pap smear test at least once a year.

Cancer of the ovary is the third common cancer among females in Nigeria. The ovaries store eggs in the female. Fertilization of these eggs by the male sperm results into babies. Cancer of the ovary occurs at any age, especially in any girl that has started enjoying sexual intercourse, but the pick age as found in a recent study by Drs. Egwuatu and Ejeckam at Enugu, is between 30 and 45 years of age. Few cases have been described in children.

Cancer of the vagina and of the vulva is a disease that mostly affect elderly woman. This does not mean that certain types of cancer of the vagina and of the vulva do not occur in the younger female, but because vulva and vagina are easily accessible, most females should easily notice any abnormalities in these areas and should go to the doctor. This could be treated by surgical excision.

Cancer of the skin: This may arise from the pigment forming cells of the skin (melanocytes) and are called malignant melanoma, while others arise from the covering of the skin and is called squamous cell carcinoma. However, if you have chronic sore on your skin or notice increase in size and deeper darkening in any black sport on your skin you should see your doctor.

Cancer of the lungs has been described as public enemy number one in the industrialised nations. It affects both males and females. The incidence of lung cancer has also increased considerably in most developing countries, including Nigeria.

Cancer of the liver is a very deadly cancer and is the commonest among males in Nigeria. It has been reported in children and women of all ages. Because the liver is inside the body and not easily accessible, it is difficult in the developing world to diagnose liver cancer in its early stages. However, in some overseas countries, some improvement have been made in the early detection of liver cancer.

Other types of cancer are of the gastrointestinal tract, oesophagus, stomach, small and large bowel, anus, pharynx (throat) and larynx (voice box), colon rectum and prostate cancer. These last two types of cancer usually affect men.

Aetiological Factors Associated With Cancer

The causes of cancer is a question that keeps recurring in the medical circle, in which it has been associated with number of factors (Papaonnou, 1974). Regato and Spjut (1997), Udoh, Fawole, Ajala, Okafor and Nwana, (1987), observed that cancer could be triggered by environmental agents.

WHO (1995), identified factors associated with cancer as follows:

- i. Tobacco in various forms of usage e.g. smoking, snuffing, chewing, can cause cancer of the lung; larynx, mouth, pharynx, oesophagus, bladder, pancreas and kidney.
- ii. Excessive intake of alcohol can cause liver, oesophageal and rectar cancer.
- iii. Dietary factors i.e smoked/salted meat and fish can cause stomach cancer; beef consumption can cause bowel cancer, high fat consumption can cause breast cancer while artificial sweeteners – food additives and contaminant – scan cause stomach cancer.
- iv. Occupational factors: workers in rubber, cement, dye and distillery industries are exposed to benzenes chemicals and can cause leukaniã and bladder cancer. Workers working in the mining industry, makers of insecticides are exposed to Arsenic, which can cause skin, lung, and liver cancer. Workers in Asbestos and plastic industries are exposed to Viny chloride. Battery industry workers are exposed to formaldehyde chemical and can cause Nasophargeal.

- v. Parasitic infection can cause disease such as sistomiasis and can lead to bladder cancer.
- vi. Over exposure to excessive sunlight and radiation can cause skin cancer.
- vii. Use of bleaching soap and cream can cause skin cancer.
- viii. Often, eating of hot food that almost burn the linen of the mouth or tongue can cause mouth, tooth and oeshopagus cancer.
- ix. Use of certain drugs, such as oestrogen and immune suppressive agents such as Azothoprine, taken for menopausal system and some birth control pills can lead to endometrial, ovary and uterus-cancer.
- x. Early sexual intercourse can cause breast, and cervical cancer.
- xi. Having multiple sexual partners can cause cervical and uterus cancer,
- xii. Abortion can cause cervical, uterus, bladder and ovarian cancer

Other risk factors associated with cervical and breast cancer are

- xiii. Obesity
- xiv. Delay of first pregnancy and low parity
- xv. Lack of breast feeding of babies
- xvi. Dietary deficiencies of vitamin A and C
- xvii. History of cervical or vulvar intraepithelial neoplasia
- xviii. Family history of breast cancer in a first degree relatives
- xix. Poor personal hygiene
- xx. Late menopause

Signs and Symptoms of cancer disease

1. change in bowel or bladder movement
2. a sore that does not heal
3. indigestion or difficulty in swallowing
4. unusual bleeding or discharge
5. thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere
6. nagging cough or hoarseness
7. obvious changes in wart or mole
8. passing blood or mucus in the stool
9. unexplained loss of weight
10. continuous itching of private part
11. blood in the sputum
12. loss of appetite and shortness of breath

Any of the above signs and symptoms may be a sign of cancer but it is better to visit a medical doctor on detection of any of these signs for medical check up.

Preventive behaviour against cancer disease

1. Adequate protective device must be provided by the employer to employees working in the industries like: rubber, asbestos, dyeing, batteries, distilleries, insecticide, and miners etc. to prevent them from inhaling and skin contact with chemicals, either liquid or gasses, that can cause cancer.
2. Avoid over exposure to excessive sunlight and radiation
3. Avoid using bleaching soap and cream.
4. Avoid eating of hot food
5. Avoid regular eating of smoked/salted fish and meat

6. Avoid regular eating of fat diet
7. Consult qualified medical doctors for family planning advice and exercise instead of using self-recommended contraceptives
8. Avoid usage of alcohol and cigarettes
9. Young girls should avoid early or premarital sexual intercourse
10. Avoid having multiple sexual partners
11. Avoid abortion
12. Ensure adequate and proper breast feeding of babies
13. Practice breast self examination
14. Go for regular medical check up if you have previous history of STD or cervical intraepithelial neoplasia
15. Report to the hospital immediately for proper check up and diagnosis if you notice any of the cancer warning signs
16. Report to the hospital for regular pap smear test.

Recommendation

In order to achieve the education of female adolescents against future proness to cancer disease, the following recommendations could be upheld. The Ministry of Education, at both Federal and State Government levels, should make health education a compulsory subject at the secondary school level, where students would be taught various health topics, including cancer disease, by professionals. Health Education Department of the Ministry of Health at both Federal and State levels should organise cancer education programmes at a regular interval for secondary school students. Non-governmental organisations should, in addition to their campaign against HIV/AIDS in various schools, organise cancer education programmes. This is to ensure that adolescent female students are well informed on

how to prevent cancer disease and also enlighten them to report any onset of cancer signs to the hospital for early diagnosis and treatment. The programme will assist them now and also prevent them against future proness to cancer disease. This will consequently reduce the morbidity and mortality rate arising from cancer disease.

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