



International Atomic Energy Agency

Statement

Resumed 73rd Session of the World Health Assembly (WHA)

Read by: Ms Lisa Stevens, Director of the Division of Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy,
Department of Technical Cooperation,

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Agenda Item 11.4 Accelerating the elimination of cervical cancer as a global public health problem

Dear Chair,

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished delegates,

2020 has revealed itself to be one of the most difficult years ever experienced. The pandemic has presented significant setbacks in cancer care; the situation has become more dire in low- and middle-income countries, where almost 90% of new cervical cancer cases and 92% of related deaths are occurring. Most of these deaths could be avoided if proper cancer screening and treatment were in place.

Even before the pandemic spread across the world, access to nuclear and radiation medicine was limited in many low-and middle-income countries, with inadequate or non-existent cancer prevention, screening, early diagnosis and treatment services. For instance, it is unacceptable that twenty-six African countries do not have a single radiotherapy machine.

A recent IAEA project identified barriers for the up scaling of brachytherapy services to help centres or countries in their efforts to provide better treatment options for their patients. Identification of simpler, more resource efficient technologies tailored to the individual needs of the country is essential.

To help professionals from developing countries to receive high-quality educational resources, the IAEA makes use of IT through for example, the IAEA Human Health Campus and a gynaecological cancer management app to help doctors more quickly and accurately evaluate the extent of cancer in female reproductive organs. Furthermore, throughout the last few months, the IAEA has provided thousands of health professionals with a wide range of resources including webinars conducted together with global professional societies in radiation medicine in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish.

While preventive measures such as vaccination programmes and screening will require some time to be systematically implemented, cancer treatment through radiation therapy is a life-saving option, still unavailable to many. The *Global Strategy to accelerate the elimination of cervical cancer*, with the 90-70-90 targets that integrate the entire spectrum of cervical cancer control (prevention, screening and treatment) is exactly what we need.

Recently the IAEA with WHO developed a joint publication “Roadmap towards a national cancer control programme” on milestones to develop radiotherapy centers for Member States use and a new document on WHO/IAEA “technical specifications for radiotherapy equipment in cancer treatment”.

The IAEA’s work to build a coalition of global partners committed to addressing this challenge, has resulted in the Women’s Cancers Partnership Initiative, a novel collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) launched in September 2019. The Initiative focuses on improving diagnosis and treatment of breast and cervical cancer through training/education of cancer care professionals and the upgrading of cancer care facilities. The Initiative already received initial support of USD 10 million grant funding from the IsDB as well as financial and in-kind contributions from selected partner governments and private sector partners. We see this partnership as supporting our efforts towards the Global Elimination Strategy.

The IAEA is also part of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force for NCDs and the *UN Joint Global Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control*, which aims to achieve a 30% reduction in deaths from cervical cancer by 2030 in participating countries.

In view of its unique mandate encompassing nuclear medicine, diagnostic radiology and radiotherapy, the IAEA is thus playing a critical role in scaling-up the effective, safe and efficient treatment of cervical cancer. The Agency’s efforts to increase access to radiotherapy in our Member States will help support the target of 90% of women with infiltrative cervix cancer to have access to quality treatment

While trying to minimise the harm the double burden of COVID-19 and cancer poses on patients in low- and middle-income countries, we need to ensure our work and efforts on non-communicable diseases like cancer, afflicting millions, goes on and reaches those in need.

This is why the IAEA is committed to strengthening its collaboration with partners like WHO and more broadly to support the UN's work in cancer control, with the aim of building the resilience of countries we work with.