

A stick closer to Lung Cancer

MANILA BULLETIN
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In RP, 20,000 deaths caused by smoking to occur every year in an age where lifestyle diseases abound, lung cancer has slowly gone up the list of killer diseases in the country, with an estimated 15,881 deaths out of the 17,238 new cases recorded in 2005 by the Philippine Cancer Society.

It has also become the leading cancer type plaguing Filipinos, overtaking breast, colon, rectal and uterine cancers by a significant margin. And with over 80 percent of lung cancer cases caused by smoking tobacco or by indirect exposure to tobacco smoke, the disease has never seemed so alarming.

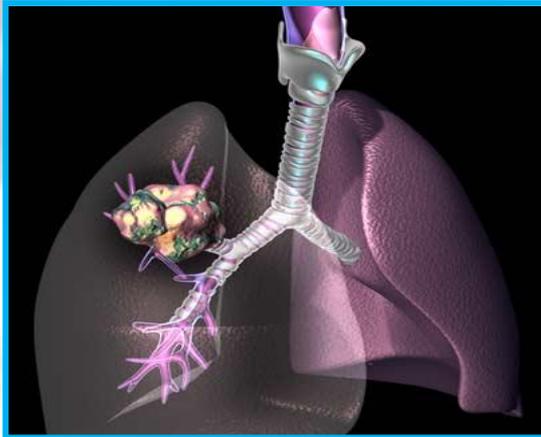
Like all cancer types, lung cancer develops when gene damage occurs in the cellular level. This damage is caused by smoking in most cases, while the rest stem from prolonged exposure to chemicals such as asbestos and radon, or as a complication of other conditions like liver and endometrial cancer.

Lung cancer is also classified into two types: Non-small-cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and small-cell lung cancer (SCLC). Around 80 percent of lung cancer cases are NSCLC.

The danger of contracting the disease also increases with age, with very few cases diagnosed in people under 40. It carries a host of symptoms from persistent coughing, difficulty in breathing, loss of appetite and general fatigue, to chest pains and coughing up blood.

And like most cancers, the signs rarely manifest until the condition is far advanced or has spread to other parts of the body. The most common method for diagnosing lung cancer is through chest X-rays and bronchoscope, followed by the standard biopsy in which small sample tissues from the lungs are extracted and analyzed.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 4,000 toxic or carcinogenic chemicals have been found in tobacco smoke, making exposure to it, by far, the biggest risk factor for lung cancer. And the longer you smoke, the greater your risk, with three-quarters of lung cancer deaths occurring in people over the age of 65 worldwide. No safe levels can also be pegged when it comes to smoking. The woman sitting next to a smoker inhaling his fumes can be as equally at risk for lung cancer



as the smoker himself. And neither light nor low-tar cigarettes offer an assurance.

In what seems like a race against time to arrest the growing number of cases, companies like Roche are stepping up to the challenge of augmenting known treatment options available to people afflicted with lung cancer. In addition to standard radiotherapy, surgery and chemotherapy, pharmaceutical companies like Roche is now looking into a breakthrough therapy for the treatment of advanced NSCLC. In the

last few years, several Phase III trials have evaluated the effect of epidermal Growth Factor Receptor tyrosine inhibitors in patients with metastatic non-small cell lung cancer.

The drug Erlotinib was also seen as exhibiting efficiency among various populations, but especially among Asian patients, with a relative reduction in the risk of mortality in all sub-groups.

Still, an ounce of prevention can be seen with increased government pressure on tobacco companies and legislative support. Despite this, an estimated 20,000 lung cancer deaths caused by smoking are expected to occur in the country every year.

There's never a better time for one to quit than now. The earlier one turns his back on smoking, the greater the chances for recouping. Only 20 minutes after the last puff, blood pressure and heart rate drops to normal. After five years, one would have decreased lung cancer risk by half. And after 15 years, life expectancy would be at par with a non-smoker's if you are under the age of 35.

To cold turkey or gradual, undergo acupuncture, hypnosis or Nicotine Replacement Therapy. Sign up for counseling and support groups. Find the quitting method that best works for you. And after all that's been said and you still feel the urge to reach for a stick or two, think.

Roche (Philippines), Inc., the Department of Health and the Philippine Cancer Society has launched The C-Network, a cancer advocacy campaign that strives to enhance the standards of cancer care and education for Filipino patients and their families. One of the campaign's primary goals is to create a community of involved individuals that will facilitate interaction and exchange of information between patients, their families and friends, and their doctors.