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General Circular Letter No: 01-61 (2011

All Provincial Directors of Health Services, All Regional Directors of Health Services, All Heads of Institutions, Medical Officers of Health (MOOH)

## World Cancer Day - 4th February 2021

The global cancer epidemic is enormous and is set to increase in the coming years. There were 19.3 million new cases in 2020. An estimated 10 million people have died from cancer during the same period (GLOBOCAN 2020). Over the next twenty years new cases of cancer is projected to increase to over 28.5 million. Urgent action must be taken to raise awareness about the disease and to develop practical strategies to address the cancer burden.

In the Sri Lankan context, neoplasms are the second leading cause of deaths (Registrar General Department). According to the National Cancer Registry 2014, there were 23, 105 incident cases with the overall crude incidence rate of 114.34 per 100,000 population and the age standardized incidence rate (ASR) of 98.1 per 100,000 population.

Cancer affects everyone in different ways and everyone has the power to take actions to reduce the impact of the disease on individuals, families, and communities. Every year, 4th of February is declared as the "World Cancer Day" to save millions of preventable deaths by raising awareness and education on the disease and pressing governments and individuals across the world to act. The tagline for the campaign in 2019 -2021 is 'I am and I will'. During the "World Cancer Day 2021" it is necessary to take a positive and proactive approach to the fight against cancer, because:

- Cancer is a disease that knows no boundaries and has, or will, affect everybody either directly or indirectly during the lifetime.
- Actions taken by every person, organisation and government will help to reduce the burden of cancer to achieve the goal of a 25% reduction in premature deaths from NCDs by 2025.
- Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, however, it is well known that more than
  one third of these deaths are preventable, and if detected early enough, many cancers are
  curable.
- Until cancer awareness is improved globally and actions are taken to prevent and treat the disease, millions of people around the world will die unnecessarily every year.

The activities for 2021 World Cancer Day should focus on the following areas:

- Conducting awareness programmes for the community covering the link between lifestyle and cancer, importance of adopting healthy lifestyle choices, misconceptions about cancers and the message that one third of cancers can be prevented.
- 2. Conducting lectures and inservice training programmes among health care staff and staff of other government and private organizations e.g. school teachers, factory workers etc. Special focus should be made on primary prevention, early detection, rehabilitation & palliative care for cancer patients at primary care setting in these lectures.
- 3. Conducting awareness and screening programmes at work places and to provide education on the benefits of a healthy diet and exercise, the dangers of smoking and other cancer risk factors. All institutions must be encouraged to make healthy lifestyles a priority in the workplace.
- Educating on signs and symptoms and the importance of timely treatment which
  has been shown to improve survival from cancer during all awareness campaigns
  and staff training sessions
- Conducting activities promoting institution-based and community-based palliative care for cancer patients and survivors.

\*Considering the prevailing situation of the COVID- 19 outbreak in the country, it is important to ensure that the newly imposed health etiquette and all safety precautions are duely maintained.

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