

World Lung Cancer Day

Lung cancer was not identified as a disease until the mid-1700s, with incidence rising since the early 20th century. But from the 1930s onwards, cases of the disease have increased exponentially, largely as a consequence of smoking and tobacco consumption worldwide. Today, the World Health Organization identifies lung cancer as the second leading cause of death globally, causing over 2 million deaths in 2018. In Singapore, statistics from the Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Report show that lung cancer is the second and third most common cancer in males and females respectively, accounting for 27% of cancer deaths in males and 17% in females.

We have come a long way from the time when lung cancer was an automatic death sentence. Lung cancer is mostly diagnosed in advanced stages, and often results in a poor prognosis. There have been numerous treatment breakthroughs from surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy; whereas targeted therapy and immunotherapy are the more recent examples of innovative treatment for advanced lung cancer. We have seen encouraging survival outcomes as a result of scientific advancement from these innovative treatments. Prior to the introduction of immunotherapy for instance, prognosis of metastatic non-small cell lung cancer was dismal with a five-year survival rate of around 5%. With immunotherapy, overall five-year survival has more than quadrupled to over 20% in patients being treated for the first time. In our homeland, real world data demonstrates that the survival of advanced lung cancer patients with adenocarcinoma subtype has improved over the past decade and this is directly associated with the use of targeted therapies.

In Singapore, we have the privilege of working closely with authorities and partners that understand the value of breakthrough medicines, leading to timely, and in some cases, accelerated approvals and availability of new drugs and indications. In addition, the introduction of Medishield Life in 2015 has provided a platform for healthcare financing and enabled better access to innovative medicines in Singapore. On top of Medishield Life, the availability of Integrated Shield Plans and Patient Access Programs offered by some insurance and pharmaceutical companies have brought the aspiration closer of having innovative medicines available to all the patients in Singapore who would benefit from them.

In commemorating World Lung Cancer Day, we celebrate the significant progress the scientific community has made in improving lung cancer survivorship. We salute the Singapore healthcare professionals and healthcare system who embrace innovation and provide patients courage and hope. We also reaffirm our commitment to public-private partnership to bring a multi stakeholder approach to solving challenging healthcare problems. It's all hands on-deck to empower patients with the opportunities to turn their lives around from lung cancer, and we have no time to lose!

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