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Cancer

'It's a miracle': It was hard to believe, but tumour was gone, say Cancer patients

14 patients recover after drug therapy, without surgery | One of trial participants an Indian (The Tribune: 20220609)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/its-a-miracle-it-was-hard-to-believe-but-tumour-was-gone-cancer-patients-402202>

'It's a miracle': It was hard to believe, but tumour was gone, say Cancer patients
Trial participants with two principal investigators Dr Luis Dias and Dr Andrea Cercek. Twitter image by Memorial Sloan Kettering

Surprising results of an ongoing medical trial holds a new ray of hope for the world of oncology, as all 14 rectal cancer patients (trial participants) managed to lose their tumours after a drug regimen of six months, without radiation or surgery.

At the end of six months, there was no sign of tumour in any trial participant during MRI scans, PET scans and endoscopy. The development is being described as the first in the cancer treatment history.

It's a miracle

That day, I did not see the tumour. I thought maybe it was hiding somewhere inside, but the doctors told me there was no tumour. It is a miracle. — Nisha, Indian-origin patient

Study's importance

Cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for 10 million deaths in 2020, or nearly one in six deaths. A correct cancer diagnosis is essential for appropriate treatment.

Feeling yet to sink in

The fact that you can go from feeling whether you are going to die or lose your colon to getting the news that you are going to be fine...it is amazing. Avery, trial participant

Led by oncologists at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, the study published in "The New England Journal of Medicine" has 32 authors and was primarily meant to test if TSR-042, a drug commonly called Dostarlimab, can treat advanced mismatch repair deficient cells, characterised by many DNA mutations which cause cancer.

All trial participants had mismatch repair deficient stage 2 or 3 rectal cancer and received the drug every three weeks over six months.

Trial leaders had planned to follow up the drug administration regime with chemotherapy and surgery as per the standard cancer treatment protocol. They had also expected some adverse reactions, as is the routine in such trials.

Surprisingly, after six months, there was no sign of tumour in any patient nor was any adverse event reported.

Leading gastrointestinal cancer expert Alan Burguete-Torres today hailed the study as a "game-changer for cancer patients". He congratulated trial leader Andrea Cercek of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for the success.

Torres, however, said a longer follow-up was required to test trial resilience, with experts also calling for a larger trial base since 14 patient base was small and replicability was key to testing if the regime worked in big cohorts. Patients, part of the study, said they could not believe the news of trial success at first.

Indian-origin patient Nisha said she thought the tumour was just hiding somewhere.

In one of the testimonial videos released by the Kettering Cancer Center, another rectal cancer patient Imtiaz said the first thing he did after Dr Cercek told him about the trial success was to call his mother. "We both cried," he said, breaking down again.

Cancer patient Sascha said she was not religious, but now believed in miracles.

"My friends had taken me to a healing mass prior and then I got the news from Dr Cercek that said it was working. So it was a combination of everybody saying it is miraculous combined with it actually being miraculous," said Sascha. The participants will be followed in the long term to assess if they have actually been cured of rectal cancer.

Monkeypox cases

More than 1,000 monkeypox cases reported to WHO

Twenty-nine countries have reported cases in the current outbreak, which began in May (The Tribune: 20220609)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/more-than-1-000-monkeypox-cases-reported-to-who-402137>

There have been more than 1,000 monkeypox cases reported to the World Health Organization in the current outbreak outside the countries in Africa where it more commonly spreads.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the risk of monkeypox becoming established in these non-endemic countries was real, but preventable at this point.

Twenty-nine countries have reported cases in the current outbreak, which began in May. None have reported deaths.

At a media briefing in Geneva, Tedros also said there had been more than 1,400 suspected cases of monkeypox this year in Africa and 66 deaths.

“It’s an unfortunate reflection of the world we live in that the international community is only now paying attention to monkeypox because it has appeared in high-income countries,” he said.

He said the outbreak was showing signs of community transmission in some countries. WHO recommends people with monkeypox isolate at home.

Cases are still predominantly among men who have sex with men, the WHO said, although cases in women have been reported.

The U.N. agency is working with organizations including UN AIDS and community groups to raise awareness and stop transmission.

Post-exposure vaccination, including for health workers or close contacts, including sexual partners - ideally within four days of exposure - may be considered for some countries, WHO added. The vaccines being used are designed against smallpox, a related, more dangerous virus that the world eradicated in 1980, but also work to protect against monkeypox, studies have shown.

WHO senior official Sylvie Briand said the agency is assessing the potency of vaccines stockpiled against smallpox and contacting manufacturers and countries who have previously pledged vaccines. Reuters

NMC regulations

NMC regulations draft proposes allowing doctors to refuse treatment in case of abusive and violent patients or relatives

According to the draft regulations, reasonable estimation of the cost of surgery or treatment should be provided to the patient to enable an informed decision (The Tribune: 20220609)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/nmc-regulations-draft-proposes-allowing-doctors-to-refuse-treatment-in-case-of-abusive-and-violent-patients-or-relatives-402136>

NMC regulations draft proposes allowing doctors to refuse treatment in case of abusive and violent patients or relatives

Photo for representational purpose only. iStock

With the aim to check violence against medicos, the National Medical Commission (NMC) in its draft professional conduct regulations has proposed allowing doctors to refuse treatment in case of abusive and violent patients or relatives.

According to the draft National Medical Commission Registered Medical Practitioner (Professional Conduct) Regulations, 2022, any request for medical records to a registered medical practitioner (RMP) responsible for patient records in a hospital either by a patient or authorised attendant has to be duly acknowledged and documents have to be supplied within five working days instead of the existing provision of 72 hours.

In case of medical emergencies, the medical records should be made available on the same day.

“The RMP who attends to the patient will be fully accountable for his actions and entitled to the appropriate fees. In case of abusive, unruly, and violent patients or relatives, the RMP can document and report the behaviour and refuse to treat the patient. Such patients should be referred for further treatment elsewhere,” the draft regulations stated.

It also specified that the use of alcohol or other intoxicants during duty or off-duty which can affect professional practice will be considered as misconduct.

According to the draft regulations, reasonable estimation of the cost of surgery or treatment should be provided to the patient to enable an informed decision.

“An RMP can refuse to continue to treat a patient if the fees, as indicated, are not paid. This is a new addition. It does not apply to doctors in government service or emergencies and the draft regulations clarify that the doctor must ensure that the patient is not abandoned,” the NMC’s Ethics and Medical Registration Board (EMRB) member Dr Yogender Malik said.

Also, for the first time, the term ‘emergency’ has been defined as “life and limb saving procedure”.

Previously, the term 'emergency' was not clearly defined, Dr Malik said.

"In case of emergency (life and limb saving procedure), an RMP shall provide first-aid and other services to the patient according to his expertise and the available resources before referral," the draft regulations read.

virus-neutralising antibodies

Moderna says Omicron-specific booster generates strong immune response The booster raises virus-neutralising antibodies by eight-fold in a study (The Tribune: 20220609)

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/health/moderna-says-omicron-specific-booster-generates-strong-immune-response-402119>

Moderna says Omicron-specific booster generates strong immune response
Photo for representational purpose only. Reuters file

Moderna Inc said on Wednesday its COVID-19 vaccine booster that targets both the original coronavirus strain and Omicron produced a better immune response against the variant than its original vaccine.

The booster raised virus-neutralising antibodies by eight-fold in a study. The vaccine was generally well-tolerated, with side effects comparable to a booster dose of mRNA-1273 at the 50 micrograms level.

"We are submitting our preliminary data and analysis to regulators with the hope that the Omicron-containing bivalent booster will be available in the late summer," Chief Executive Stephane Bancel said in a statement.

Hypertension, prostate cancer,

Hypertension, prostate cancer, and other tests that are a must for men over 40

**International Men's Health Month: Over 80 per cent of people with
hypertension do not have any symptoms and the only way to figure it out is
by evaluation, says a doctor (The Indian Express: 20220609)**

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/international-men-health-month-tests-men-over-40-health-evaluation-7956758/>

International Men's Health Month, men health, tests for men, men's health, health checkups for men after 40, healthy living men, cancer evaluation for men, heart health men, indian express news Cardiac evaluation is important. (Photo: Getty/Thinkstock)

June is observed as International Men's Health Month, prompting men around the world to prioritise their health and look for signs and symptoms signalling health issues, which can be taken care of before they turn serious.

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After a certain age, regular health checkups are a must for both men and women, and Dr Niti Raizada, director, medical oncology and hemato oncology at Fortis Group of Hospitals, Richmond Road Bangalore says men above the age of 40 should approach their health in a specific way.

Next would be to evaluate the pre-diabetic state. "This will help determine if the person is on the course of metabolic syndrome and course correction in lifestyle will need to be immediately adopted to prevent future disorders," says Dr Raizada.

Immunotherapy cancer

Immunotherapy cancer trial: Will results last long term compared to traditional therapies?

In addition to larger trials, there's a need to conduct a randomised control trial. Besides, even if effective, cost is a worry, doctors tell Anonna Dutt. (The Indian Express: 20220609)

<https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/immunotherapy-cancer-trial-results-long-term-traditional-therapies-7959343/>

The study by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre-New York used a monoclonal antibody marketed by GlaxoSmithKline, called Dostarlimab, for the treatment of people with a specific type of stage 2 and stage 3 rectal cancers. (Image: Getty Images/Thinkstock)

The news of an under-trial immunotherapy, resulting in complete disappearance of rectal cancer in all 12 participants, has been making waves among cancer specialists. The doctors, however, have said it is just an exciting scientific development that will likely take years to become the standard in healthcare.

The study by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre-New York used a monoclonal antibody marketed by GlaxoSmithKline, called Dostarlimab, for the treatment of people with a specific

type of stage 2 and stage 3 rectal cancers. The drug is currently approved for treatment of endometrial cancer in the United States (US) and the European Union.

The study shows that the immunotherapy alone – without any chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery that have been staples of cancer treatment – completely cured patients with a particular kind of rectal cancer called a mismatch repair-deficient cancer.

All 12 patients had completed the treatment and were followed for six to 25 months. “No cases of progression or recurrence had been reported during the follow-up,” the study said. The response was also rapid with symptoms resolving in 81 per cent of the patients within nine weeks of starting the therapy.

Explained |How a drug trial cured cancer in all treated patients, what it means for India
“The study shows remarkable results. But it includes not just a small number of patients but also a very small sub-set of all colorectal cancers. The mismatch repair-deficient rectal cancer that the study addresses accounts for about five per cent of all rectal cancer cases. So, is it an advancement of science? Absolutely. Is it a miracle cure for rectal cancer? No. Even among the small sub-set of patients that the study addresses, there needs to be a study on cost-effectiveness. Monoclonal antibodies are typically very expensive therapies and are not always provided by the Government even in developed countries like the UK,” said Dr VP Bhalla, surgical gastroenterologist at PSRI hospital and the current president of Indian Association of Surgical Gastroenterology.

PD1 blockades, the category of drug this monoclonal antibody falls under, are currently used in several types of mismatch repair-deficient cancers even in India, including cancers that have metastasized (or spread to other parts of the body). The therapy, however, is used along with surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy and not in isolation as seen in the current study.

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Also read |‘Cancer vanishing drug trial exciting but far from a breakthrough’

Eliminating other treatments for rectal cancers can improve a patient’s quality of life by preserving fertility, sexual health and bladder and bowel functions.

Mismatch repair deficiency is most common among colorectal, gastrointestinal and endometrial cancers. The patient lacks the genes to correct typos in the DNA that occur naturally while cells make copies.

“If you imagine the immune system to be a car, PD1 acts as the brakes for the T cells of the immune system. By giving the PD1 blockades, we release the brakes and allow the T-cells to destroy cancerous growth,” explained Dr PK Julka, former professor of radiotherapy at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences-New Delhi and the current chairman of Max Oncology Daycare Centre. He did the first immunotherapy treatment in India at AIIMS in 2015.

Also read |New study recommends next-generation sequencing for extending lung cancer treatment to more patients

His former colleague, Dr MD Ray, professor of surgical oncology at AIIMS, said, “The study is extremely small. The results have to be proven in a larger population... Besides, we have to look at the cost factor. The treatments cost around Rs 3-4 lakh per month. How many patients

in India do you think can afford it? Chemotherapy and radiotherapy, which are much cheaper in comparison, can be used to manage these patients as well.”

Safe foods

Safe foods: On the need to develop lab infrastructure in States (The Hindu: 20220609)

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/safe-foods-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-need-to-develop-food-laboratory-infrastructure-in-states/article65507222.ece>

States need help in developing food laboratory infrastructure and enhancing manpower. Food safety and consumer empowerment are areas in need of constant attention in India, where enforcement is often lax. But in this, Tamil Nadu deserves credit for finishing at the top among 17 large States for food safety; it was ranked third in the previous edition of the State Food Safety Index. That Tamil Nadu, with 82 marks, is ahead of Gujarat by 4.5 marks and Maharashtra by 12 marks, highlights its creditable showing. Developed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Food Safety Index evaluates States and Union Territories on these parameters, apart from their size: human resources and institutional data; compliance; food testing – infrastructure and surveillance; training and capacity building, and consumer empowerment. Tamil Nadu has improved its standing in ‘human resources and institutional data’, and ‘training and capacity building’. There has been incremental progress in ‘compliance’ (which measures overall coverage of food businesses in licensing and registration), and ‘food testing’ (which scrutinises availability of adequate testing infrastructure with trained manpower in the States/Union Territories for testing food samples). The State has performed marginally lower than what it did last year in ‘consumer empowerment’. But barring Tamil Nadu, there is nothing for the other southern States to cheer about despite the region being more advanced than the rest of India in many socio-economic indicators. Kerala, which came second last time, is now at sixth spot; Karnataka has retained its ninth position; Telangana slipped from 10 to 15 and Andhra Pradesh dropped to the last slot from the penultimate slot in the previous edition when 20 States were covered, unlike the 17 now. Among Union Territories, Puducherry rose from seventh to sixth spot.

But in an area such as food safety, States alone cannot make a big difference without the support of the Central government. Liberal assistance should be

COVID-19

COVID-19 | India registers over 7,000 cases after 99 days (The Hindu: 20220609)

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-records-7240-new-covid-19-cases-8-deaths-on-june-9-2022/article65509656.ece>

The active cases have increased to 32,498

The single-day rise in new coronavirus infections in the country was recorded over 7,000 after 99 days, registering around 39% jump in daily cases, while the daily positivity rate crossed 2% after 111 days, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday.

TB

Community involvement aiding battle against TB in Assam (The Indian Express: 20220609)

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/community-involvement-aiding-battle-against-tb-in-assam/article65487299.ece>

According to the World Health Organization, India bears about a quarter of the world's TB burden. File image of an X-ray of a tuberculosis patient for representation

According to the World Health Organization, India bears about a quarter of the world's TB burden. File image of an X-ray of a tuberculosis patient for representation | Photo Credit: Nissar Ahmad

Government sets goal of reducing tuberculosis infection rate from 217 per lakh in 2015 to 44 per lakh by 2025

Involving the community has helped devise strategies to break psychological barriers in the battle against tuberculosis in Assam and three other States, an initiative by a Karnataka-based trust has revealed.

The Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) has been running a USAID-supported project on TB across four States — Assam, Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana — targeting the most vulnerable groups, such as mining and industrial workers, tea garden workers, migrants, the urban vulnerable, and tribal people.

The KHPT's Assam project covers tea plantation workers in Dibrugarh, the tribal population in Baksa, and the urban vulnerable in Kamrup (Metro) district.

“A total of 625 TB patients and caregivers benefited from 99 care and support group meetings involving 315 community structures. The project clearly shows how community structures have contributed to TB response in the three districts, and their initiative has contributed to 72,168 [individuals] being screened,” Prasenjit Das, the project's Assam head said.

KHPT's programme director Rehana Begam said the project had begun with conducting a primary behavioural study and webinars to assess and dive deep into the contexts, barriers and other nuances surrounding the populations vulnerable to TB.

“A mapping exercise was subsequently undertaken to identify vulnerable clusters for implementing the planned initiatives and developing behavioural change solutions so that people overcome stigma and gender issues and come forward for detection and treatment,” she said.

“Concurrently, we focused on creating an environment of encouragement for the TB patient and caregivers by involving TB survivors who have experienced these problems and who extend support and take them through this journey. What is critical is the community voice that informs our strategy and every step of the action,” Ms. Begam said.

Avijit Basu, the State TB officer in Assam's Department of Health Services, said the State government has been working on the goal of reducing the TB infection rate from 217 per lakh in 2015 to 44 per lakh by 2025 under the ongoing National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme.

According to the World Health Organization, India bears about a quarter of the world's TB burden, with the disease killing close to half a million people in the country annually.

Infodemic' on immunity boosters

Infodemic' on immunity boosters (The Indian Express: 20220609)

<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/indians-gorged-on-vitamin-c-rich-fruits-zinc-supplements-during-pandemic/article65487767.ece>

India has witnessed a steep rise in the number of people seeking information on social media related to COVID-19 and immunity.

India has witnessed a steep rise in the number of people seeking information on social media related to COVID-19 and immunity. | Photo Credit: M. Srinath

Study tracks search trends in food and its impact during the pandemic

What were the most searched and consumed foods during the COVID pandemic in India? Top nutrition scientists in the country say that Indians gorged on Vitamin C-rich fruits, zinc

supplements and traditional supplements like ginger and garlic, while opting to stay away from non-vegetarian foods, frozen foods and Chinese cuisine.

Scientists studying the search trends in foods explain that though the search interest in Ayurvedic Kadha (a decoction of spices and herbs) was found to be very high, the usage was markedly low.

“Rise in COVID-19 cases had a direct association with the search trends,” said Dr. Subba Rao M. Gavaravarapu, scientist and head, Nutrition Information, Communication and Health Education Division, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition, who headed the study titled “Impact of ‘infodemic’ in pandemic’ on food and nutrition related perceptions and practices of Indian Internet users”.

Published in PLoS One, a peer-reviewed open access scientific journal, the study explained that the uncontrolled spread of (mis)information, news and propaganda related to COVID-19 created an ‘infodemic’ leading to panic and unscientific practices among the masses.

Social media tips

The study found that most people admitted relying on social media for gathering COVID-19 associated tips for boosting immunity, but those with a history of COVID-19 infection reported relying more on doctors and health professionals for information.

“With the largest number of Internet users in the world, India has witnessed a steep rise in the number of people seeking information on social media related to COVID-19. This study aimed to evaluate the trend of COVID-19 associated food and nutrition news search by Indian Internet users between 27th January 2020 and 30th June 2021 (time period between the first detected COVID-19 case and the end of the second wave in India) and its impact on their perceptions and practices,” said Dr. Gavaravarapu.

“The association between the change in Relative Search Volume (RSV) on Google Trends (GT) of 34 popularly searched keywords classified by the researchers under 5 different categories — “Immunity”, “Eating behavior”, “Food safety”, “Food scares and concerns” and “Covid scare” — showed a steep rise in search for immunity boosters, vitamin supplement brands “ayush kadha (ayurvedic decoction) during the first wave (April-August 2020),” said the study.

An online survey conducted on adult Indian Internet users (n = 572) reported high (71.9%) consumption of Vitamin C-rich fruits as well as Vitamin C (68.2%) and Zinc (61.4%) supplements to boost immunity. Traditional Indian spices like ginger and garlic were used by 62.9% and 50.9% respondents respectively.

Infodemic

Interestingly, although ‘kadha/kashayam’ (decoction of medicinal herbs) and ‘chawanprash’ (an Ayurvedic health mixture made of various herbs and spices) were quite hyped, fewer participants reported having consumed them (28.8% and 57.5% respectively). Dependence on homeopathy medicines for immunity boosting against COVID-19 was found to be the least (28.1%).

“This study highlights the need for media and health literacy to advocate use of health information cautiously,” said Dr. Gavaravarapu.

Even before the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, had mentioned another epidemic — an epidemic of misinformation. It was termed ‘Infodemic’, which literally means superfluity of information.

The study noted that the concept of “immunity boosting foods” as a preventive strategy to fight COVID-19 infection gained a lot of traction during the pandemic.