

Snehathalam Phase II Oral Cancer Screening and Cancer Awareness Programmes

The second phase of Snehathalam was started 4th February 2016, the World Cancer Day. There were two components in the programme envisaged. 1. Screening for Oral Cancer among high risk population, 2. Imparting Cancer awareness to groups requesting for that.

For screening a training of doctors who will actually carry out the work was held in RCC, Trivandrum, to have uniformity in the method of Oral Examination, Criteria for Clinical Diagnosis, referral protocols and management of Oral pre-cancers.

A set of pamphlets were developed by Dr. Babu Mathew. 1. General Information to high risk group about causes, clinical features and natural history of oral cancer and pre cancer. There was suggestion for mouth self examination and request to come for oral examination in a nearby detection camps. The second was for doctors involved in screening showing the protocol for management of oral pre cancers and referral practice.

The cancer awareness programme was originally targeted to be school children,. However, since there were requests from Resident's Association and voluntary groups the format of the programme was modified. Again to have uniformity of in the content of message given during the awareness, an electronic presentation was generated. It has two components. 1. General information about Cancer and causes of all cancers and methods to avoid or prevent in possible scenario 2. specific details of Oral cancer in Kerala and details of prevention and control of Oral cancer. This presentation has 91 slides and can be given to anybody interested to use it for awareness.

During the period MORE THAN 100 of awareness classes were taken. The screening programme started on the day of inauguration itself. The general policy was to target, the screening in the costal areas among fishermen with the help of animators of the TSSS. However since one cannot ethically deny a request from genuine groups, the screening camps were conducted on almost all on a on a first come first served basis. This included resident association, groups in techno park, Philanthropic Organization etc.

As a result of the screening it was clearly shown that it is not effective in every one, but to concentrated in people who are at high risk for Oral cancer. Out of 65 cancers detected 55 were from the costal areas, and majority of oral was also from here . The indicates that as a continuation of this project the costal belt coming under the Archdioces Trivandrum should be covered with the help of TSSS in a phased manner.

The fishermen are aware that their special tobacco chewing and drinking habits are mainly causative for oral cancer. But they are not willing to give up the habits of chewing as they consider it as the only way to keep awake in the sea during night. The tobacco stem, the ripe arecanut and the shell lime they use for chewing are dangerous components; Yet they are not willing to change the composition of chewing materials.

A detailed discussion is very essential with doctors Psychiatric, Behaviour science persons, Priest and Fishermen to modulate the chewing habit to some other harmless practice. For example the Greek fishermen use a gum from a tree known as “Mastica” for the last 3500 years, harmless, effective. We should also come out with a proper solution to stop the present type of tobacco chewing by the fishermen.

The screening programme has diagnosed 65 new oral cancers more than 500 pre cancers suspicious of malignancy. These were referred to RCC and Dental College Trivandrum for management. A large number of pre cancers were given treatment and require follow up after 6 months. Strategies to have good compliance in the follow up camps are being worked out.

Dr.Babu Mathew Rtd. Professor of Community Oncology was Co-ordinating the screening programmes. The screening was carried out by teams from Govt. Dental College Trivandrum under the leadership of Prof.Anita Balan and PMS Dental College Vattappara under the supervision of Prof.V.Vivek and doctors from RCC Trivandrum. 16 Junior staff members participated in the programme and all of them are highly charged in the success of this programme. The overall planning and communications were carried out by Devi Chandramohan very efficiently

It is started with satisfaction that the whole phase II programme went on as planned and we are able to study new vistas to combat oral cancer in future .