Lack of awareness makes cancer deadly

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Kolkata: Around 10 lakh people are diagnosed with cancer in India every year. Among them, 80,000 belong to Kolkata. Yet, there's a lack of awareness about the dreaded disease. Mostly, it's looked down upon as a social malice. Busting various myths regarding cancer and lifestyle that causes it, the Bengal Oncology Awards 2011 on Sunday kicked off with the debate “Samaj O Sarkar Cancer Er Bishoye Ki Udasin?”

The most pertinent question thrown up by eminent panelists at GD Birla Sahabhagar was whether cancer patients are exploited by the society on the pretext of ailing health? “Do we turn to cancer patients with sympathy?” asked Dr. Gautam Mukhopadhyay, oncology surgeon and director of Bengal Oncology Foundation. “What needs to change is the approach towards the disease,” pointed out Krishna Basu, president of the foundation.

“When a woman is diagnosed with cancer, she needs support from her immediate family. It's psychological support that's of utmost importance,” Basu said. Singer-actor Silajit, who lost his father to the disease and whose wife too is suffering from cancer, stressed on the need to consult a psychiatrist if the situation demands so. “I have been to psychiatrists and it helps. Cancer is not the end of the world. If someone in the family is suffering from the disease, it's important to lend him/her support and to give treatment your best shot.”

Raising another important issue, the panelists pointed out that even if lakhs are spent on awareness campaigns for AIDS by the government, nothing much has been done for cancer so far. “It's not that cancer is the most harmful of all diseases, yet, it's the most dreaded of all. Lack of awareness is the root cause of the problem,” said Dr Mukhopadhyay. Concurring his views, vice-president of the foundation Dr Subir Ganguly recalled, “When I was working at the Burdwan Medical College, I had seen how a woman was not willing to come for treatment because she was busy raising her son, who would, in turn, be a support to her husband — a farmer working in the fields. The common notion was that women, not being the bread earner, was the most dispensable part of a family. It's this mindset which needs to change.”

The Bengal Oncology Award for the year went to Tarun Basak, who despite being operated upon thrice for oral cancer, works endlessly for the cause of the disease. Another recipient of the award was the organization — Fight Cancer.