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Experts worry over growing cancer burden in Nigeria

By Emmanuel Elebeke

Participants at the just concluded international conference on modern cancer management entitled “Infections and Cancer” held in Abuja, have raised alarm over the growing burden of cancer in the country and called for immediate intervention. The revelation that by 2020, there would be 42 million cancer cases in the country as speculated 21 years ago, was highlighted at the event, organised by the Society of Oncology and Cancer Research of Nigeria,(SOCRON) cancer Registration and Epidemiology in association with the International Prevention Research Institute.



The conference was to improve ability of cancer registries staff from Nigeria that will produce data on cancer incidence with sufficient quality, in order to sustain cancer control programmes and serve as a platform for etiological research and epidemiological studies for geographical patterns of cancer incidence in the country.

Associate Director of Institute of Human Virology, University of Maryland, Baltimore, USA, Prof. Williams Blatter said with over three million people living with HIV& AIDS, associated malignancies are set to become the commonest cancer in Nigeria. Despite this startling evidence, he noted that oncology services and research in Nigeria had remained fragmentary and poorly developed, adding that the state of cancer care in Nigeria mimics the situation for HIV&AIDS treatment in the early years of HIV in the country.

“In a space of 30 years, counting from 1990, Nigeria is going to move from 24 to 42 million breast cancer patients because the population is young,” said Prof Isaac Adebamowo of the IHV, Nigeria. He said the rate of women with cancer in Nigeria doubles yearly due to lack awareness, shortage of man power for treatment and palliative care, shortage of drugs and lack of and proper education.

Lamenting the high incidence of cancer and absence of formalised way of caring for cancer, he said the contemporary issues have proved that cancer is where HIV was some years back, in terms of number of mortality rate