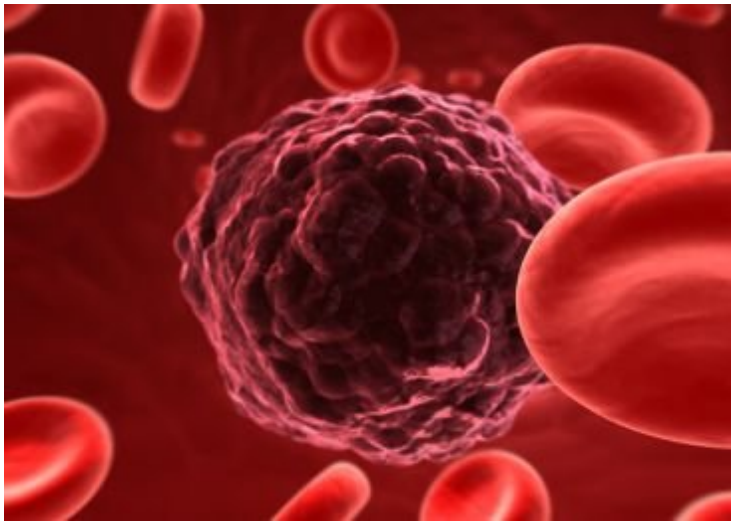
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Cancer research gets due priority, DBT & AIIMS sign agreement

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Cancer research gets due priority, DBT & AIIMS sign agreement



At a time when cancer cases in India as per reports, would cross about 7 lakh by 2015, the government has decided to tackle the disease head on. In that context, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) under the ministry of science and technology, and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, through it upcoming National Cancer Institute at Jhajjar have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 22nd August, 2014 for furtherance of Cancer Research, taking into cognizance that the cancer disease burden is fast reaching pandemic proportions in India. The initiative was been formally announced on September 02, 2014.

While DBT funds research using modern tools of biology, AIIMS is a tertiary-care hospital cum research center. Both recognize the importance of collaborative and complimentary research so as to bring about an improvement in public awareness on likely causes of cancer, prevention strategies, early-detection, and improved therapeutic interventions to improve the quality of life and the survival rate.

Their efforts will specially focus on cancers unique to India such as Gall-bladder, oral and cervical and Naso-pharyngeal cancer, and others with a high disease burden. DBT has been supporting basic, clinical, and molecular epidemiological cancer research through its various schemes for the past 20 years. It promoted the development of diagnostics for cervical cancer, indigenous cervical cancer vaccines, immuno-modulation clinical trials, and biomarker discovery. Schemes such as SBIRI and BIRAC which support industry are proactive in funding bio-similar therapeutics, monoclonal antibodies etc., to bring down the cost. This helps the cancer treatment become less expensive for individuals and the social system.

AIIMS, on the other hand is developing a National Cancer Institute at its upcoming Jhajjar campus where the focus is also on cancer research, in addition to patient care and management. The project, to be developed at a cost of about Rs 2,000 crore as sanctioned by the Ministry of Health in the coming three and a half years. It is expected to be a big step in research for cancer in the country and would play a significant role in cancer treatment.

So far, India has about 28 Regional Cancer Centers that mainly treat patients. However, research has not been a priority. Through this MoU, there is a plan to set up a joint Research Advisory Board to identify areas of research: immediate, medium and long-term planning, evolve a consensus mechanism to harmonize administrative and financial processes and approvals (evaluation, funding, and monitoring) through mutual discussion, develop a policy perspective including economic analysis and forecasting for technology with potential for use in public health especially in cancer related areas, Scientific Research collaborations in the area of Cancer Biology to promote development of new affordable technologies, introduction of the available technologies in the system and provide support for the diffusion of technologies into the social system.

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To fulfill this, joint efforts will be made for research and its translation to public health in India; with specific focus on cancers unique to India, jointly design clinical trials, collaborate for joint development and evaluation of vaccines, diagnostics, biomarkers, therapeutics etc., in translational research with strong networking and co-ordination.

Training of man-power by offering joint clinical fellowships; building capacity in the country within medical schools or outside the system; opening the facilities and infrastructure to scientists identified under the jointly agreed programs; jointly support competence building through short-term training programs in GLP, GCP, quality control, IPR, regulation, and clinical trial skills that are critical for development of new technologies, co-creating a state-of-the art Bio-bank with well annotated specimens.

The two premier institutions will also jointly support and forge partnership with industry for the development and evaluation of products for public health through a Public Private Partnership within the framework of their rules and regulations.