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சுகாதார மற்றும் வெகுஜன ஊடக அமைச்சு
Ministry of Health & Mass Media

Circular Number: 01 - 07 / 2025

All Provincial Directors of Health Services
All Regional Directors of Health Services
All Heads of Institutions
Medical Officers of Health (MOOH)

World Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month – March 2025

Cancer has become a global epidemic, with a rising trend observed across most types. Colorectal cancer (CRC) is a major public health concern worldwide, following this upward trajectory. It ranks as the third most common cancer globally for both men and women and is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths. According to GLOBOCAN, over 1.9 million new cases and 900,000 deaths were reported in 2022.

In Sri Lanka, colorectal cancer is also the third most common cancer among both males and females, as per the National Cancer Registry - 2021. In 2021, 1,522 new cases were reported among men, and 1,596 cases among women.

The increasing incidence of colorectal cancer can be attributed to lifestyle changes, an aging population, and limited awareness of early symptoms. Late-stage diagnosis remains a significant challenge, underscoring the need for greater awareness, early detection, and prevention efforts. Immediate action is necessary to raise awareness about the disease and to implement strategies for early detection and prevention.

Colorectal cancer is a malignant condition that originates from the inner lining of the colon or rectum. It typically develops from precancerous polyps that, over time, can grow and transform into invasive cancer if left undetected. While it can be life-threatening, **CRC is treatable when detected early**. Lifestyle changes such as a high-fiber diet, regular physical activity, and avoiding smoking and alcohol consumption are crucial in reducing the risk of CRC. Additionally, screening methods like fecal occult blood tests, fecal immunochemical tests, colonoscopy, and sigmoidoscopy can detect precancerous lesions before they progress into cancer.

Raising public awareness and focusing on early intervention are key to controlling CRC. Often, CRC does not present symptoms, particularly in its early stages. Recognizing **red flag symptoms like recent onset rectal bleeding, persistent changes in bowel habits lasting more than two weeks is crucial for early detection**. It is essential to rule out CRC in patients presenting with these symptoms before starting any treatment. Seeking prompt medical attention can significantly improve survival rates.

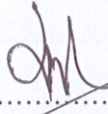
Healthcare professionals, particularly those at first contact points, must exercise extra care when evaluating patients with these symptoms. **A per rectal (PR) examination is mandatory in such cases**, as it provides valuable diagnostic insights. This simple examination can help rule out hemorrhoids and determine whether further invasive investigations, such as flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy, are necessary.

During CRC awareness month in March 2025, it is vital to increase awareness among both healthcare staff and the general public about risk factors, symptoms, and the importance of early detection. Empowering individuals to seek early treatment can help reduce the burden of CRC and improve outcomes through timely diagnosis and treatment.

During the inaugural CRC awareness month, the following initiatives are being promoted:

1. **Empowering Healthcare Staff:** Offer in-service training programs at hospital settings or Medical Officer of Health (MOOH) offices to educate health staff about CRC. Resource persons such as Consultant Surgeons, Consultant Gastrointestinal Surgeons, Consultant Oncosurgeons, and Consultant Gastrointestinal Physicians can lead these sessions.
2. **Utilizing resource materials:** Access and utilize the educational resources available on the NCCP website at www.nccp.health.gov.lk.
3. **Public awareness activities:** Organize public awareness campaigns using both traditional and innovative methods to reach a wide audience.

Your leadership and active participation in disseminating the contents of this circular to all relevant officers within your institution are highly appreciated. For further information, please contact the Director of NCCP at Tel: 0112368627 or via email at nccpmohsl@gmail.com.


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