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Cairo conf. discusses new vision for cancer treatment

UNDER the theme of "Reimagining Cancer", a conference that was held in Cairo recently has focused on hematological oncology and blood disease treatments in Egypt.

The participants of the conference addressed specific hematological disorders prevalent in Egypt such as thalassemia, a severe form of anemia that is most often of a hereditary origin.

Nine per cent of Egyptians are carriers of the gene that is at the root of the disease, which is one of the highest rates in the world, the participants said.

"Thalassemia is a serious disease but it can be well-managed with the help of modern treatments, particularly new, oral iron chelation drugs that only have mild side effects," Dr Mervat Mattar Professor of Hematology at Cairo University, told the conference.

She added that the Health Insurance Authority had made these new drugs available as part of treatment protocols for thalassemia patients to ensure that they had access to the

best and most advanced drugs that were developed around the world.

Dr Mattar noted that treatment of chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) had witnessed a quantum leap over the past 50 years, which had helped transform it from a life-threatening disease that required bone marrow transplant surgeries to a treatable disorder with the help of targeted therapy.

"This represents a breakthrough in cancer treatment in general and in the area of hematological oncology in particular," she added.

"Studies have shown that this treatment approach has increased patients' survival rates to up to 90 per cent helping patients lead a normal life afterwards. The CML has evolved from a life-threatening, chronic disease to one that is treatable," Dr Mattar said.

Dr Hesham el-Ghazaly, Professor of Oncology at Ain Shams University, said that the participants discussed the latest developments pertaining to breast cancer treatment.

The conference papers had also highlighted targeted therapy, methods to overcome hormone resistance and the latest treatment options for pre-menopausal or pre-menopausal advanced breast cancer patients across different age groups. He stressed the importance of early diagnosis in achieving full recovery for breast cancer patients.

For her part, Dr Ibtisam Saad Eddin, Oncology Professor at Cairo University, said that the latest official statistics, which were released last year, showed that breast cancer was the second most prevalent disease in the country.

"Breast cancer represents up to 17.9 per cent of all types of cancer in Egypt," she said.

"The conference showcased Novartis Pharma's vision and support for patients and healthcare providers and highlighted the significant scientific research and development efforts required to diversify treatment options for patients," according to Dr Sherif Amin, Novartis Oncology General Manager for Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco.



DR Sherif Amin addressing the conference on a new vision of cancer treatment.