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Cancer down below requires awareness

SOME may not like to hear the word "colonoscopy," but the rather invasive procedure is the first line of defence against cancer of the bowels, also known as colorectal cancer.

First developing as benign, asymptomatic growths in the large intestine, this form of cancer can be detected easily if people are vigilant and catch growths before they eventually transform into cancer cells. New medicines like Stivarga are helping treat the disease, but doctors say prevention is still the best medicine.

"With nearly 4,000 new cases diagnosed every year, colorectal cancer is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths in Egypt, resulting in an annual death toll of between 1,200 and 1,500 cases.

If diagnosed at an advanced stage, chances of recovery from colorectal cancer are minimal, however, early detection drives cure rates up to nearly 95 per cent," said Dr Yasser Abdel Qader, Professor of Oncology.

"Before talking about treatment, we should emphasise prevention. Colorectal cancer is, to a large extent, preventable and mortality rates are strongly linked to neglecting preemptive colonoscopies, as a result of not being aware of their existence, a reluctance to discuss the issue with a physician or an unjustified fear of the procedure," said Dr Abdel Qader.

Colorectal cancer affects men and women almost equally, at a ratio of 55 per cent to 45 per cent, respectively. A 2015 study by the American Cancer Society conducted between 2009 and 2011 showed that men face a 1:21 chance of suffering from the disease while a woman's risk was assessed at 1:22.

"Treatment begins by defining a clear therapeutic plan tailored to each patient's case. It may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, monoclonal antibody therapy and post-treatment care. Surgery is usually the first step, unless the disease has progressed to an

advanced stage, leaving palliative care as the only option," he added.

"The launch of Stivarga in Egypt is a breakthrough," said Dr Heinz-Josef Lenz, the

Associate Director for Adult Oncology. "This oral drug contains the active substance regorafenib and can be singularly prescribed. It has demonstrated efficacy in controlling the disease and preventing its spread.

An advanced treatment option, Stivarga is a third-line therapy for colorectal cancer according to international protocols.

In addition to its proven efficacy, it can also replace intravenous drug administration, saving patients time, energy and costs."

Professor Lenz added that, "Compared to preceding treatment options, Stivarga hinders the development of cancerous cells by inhibiting protein kinase – the enzymes responsible for the transmission

of chemical signals involved in the development of cancer cells."

He went on to detail the drug's abilities, saying that, "Stivarga's ability to inhibit the growth of new cancer-cell-feeding vessels has been established, as well as its capacity to slow down the growth of tissue containing cancer cells, and to inhibit cancer cell division by interrupting the chemical signals that trigger the division and multiplication of cancer cells."

Symptoms of colorectal cancer only appear at advanced stages so preemptive colonoscopies are vital to detect any benign growths and have them immediately removed.

Common symptoms of colorectal cancer include changes in bowel movements, such as constipation or diarrhea, a sensation of being unable to completely empty bowels, frequent stomachaches, in addition to ongoing fatigue or unexplained vomiting, nausea and weight loss.