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Leukaemia becoming a treatable disease

A CAMPAIGN entitled "Follow-up for Peace of Mind" has launched to mark **World Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML) Day**, aimed at supporting patients with Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia. The campaign provides Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests in Alexandria, Cairo (at the Nasser Institute), Mansoura and Upper Egypt free of charge.

Haematologists have tackled the causes, diagnosis and challenges that patients with CML face, and available advances in treatment. Accounting for 15 per cent of all leukaemia cases among adults, CML has an annual incidence rate of 1.5 per cent for every 100,000 people, and is more common in men.

"CML treatment has witnessed major breakthroughs over the last 50 years," said Dr Ashraf el-Ghandour, a professor of haematology at Alexandria University. "Targeted therapies have ushered in new horizons in the treatment of cancer in general and leukaemia in particular. They have transformed CML from a disease that with a mean onset age of 40 was only curable using bone marrow transplants, to an illness that is now largely treatable."

Dr Manal el-Soradi, head of the haematology department at Alexandria University, explained that, "CML is triggered by a mutation involving a single gene, the BCR-ABL gene, leading to tyrosine-specific protein kinases. This raises the success rate of targeted therapy for CML in comparison to other diseases resulting from multiple genetic mutations. Second-generation targeted therapies have increased cure rates to unprecedented levels; the number of patients undergoing bone marrow transplants has fallen from 34 per cent to only three per cent over the last five years."

Professor of haematology Dr Mervat Mattar, from school of medicine at Cairo University, explained that, "Targeted therapies have revolu-



Dr Mervat Mattar

tionised the CML treatment landscape."

She added, "With the development of first-generation targeted therapies, cancer patients had hope, but second-generation therapies represent a true breakthrough. Studies have shown that with treatment adherence, second-generation therapies have increased patient survival rates to 90 per cent, facilitated rapid recovery, and eliminated the need for hospitalisation. Moreover, side effects were minimal and have not caused treatment discontinuation."

Dr Mattar said that newer therapies have transformed CML to a treatable illness with a drastically improved prognosis are now available in Egypt, and are provided to National Health Insurance patients as well as to patients receiving treatment at the state's expense.

CanSurvive, the Egyptian association for the support of patients with cancer, stressed the importance of dispelling common misconceptions of leukaemia patients, and asserted the need to give patients psychological and moral support. They hoped that more people would be inspired by survivors' success stories to shift their view towards patients, who are active community members leading normal full-fledged lives enabled by better treatment.