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# Combating liver cancer

**Amina Abdul Salam**

**LIVER** cancer affects five to seven people out of 100,000 in Egypt per annum and leads to the death of six people.

According to Dr Ashraf Omar, a professor of the liver and digestive system at Cairo University, liver cancer is characterised by high mortality and presents a national problem. Patients with liver cancer have doubled in the past 12 years; the rate has jumped from 4 per cent in 1993 to 8.5 per cent in 2005. Dr Omar, who is also secretary general of the Egyptian Society for Liver Cancer (ESLC), pointed out that the hepatitis viruses B and C are mainly responsible for liver cancer, apart from heavy alcohol consumption. Thus liver cancer is the third biggest worldwide cause of death. A press conference focused on the aspects of the third annual ESLC conference earlier this month.

"The society has identified three aspects to deal with the issue," Dr Omar explained. They are early detection in collaboration with the Health Ministry, continuing medical education and scientific research.

Dr Omar noted that the treatment choices for liver cancer depend on the stage of the disease, the liver functions and overall health of a patient. He added that the latest research showed that so-called target therapy contributed to increasing the survival of patients.

According to Dr Hamdi Abdel-Azim, a professor and head of the Oncology Department at Cairo University, the discovery of the RAF kinase inhibitor protein present in 60 to 80 per cent of liver cancer patients was considered a turning point in

liver cancer treatment. It led to the introduction of Sorafenib, a target therapy that helps stop the growth of cancer cells and has increased the chance of survival, particularly in advanced stages.

Dr Ahmed el-Dorry, a professor of intervention radiology at Ain Shams University and ESLC chairman, highlighted another development in treatment options.

"ESLC successfully introduced radio immobilisation in Egypt, a treatment in which radioactive particles are delivered to a tumour through the bloodstream, emitting radiation that kills cancer cells."

"Preventing the spread of infection is the mission of the National Committee to combat HVC and eradicate hepatitis B and C, the two main causes of liver cancer. Early detection and treatment are essential to prevent the disease from progressing to cirrhosis and liver tumours. Over the past five years, the National Committee made substantial advances towards achieving its mission; 23 treatment centres were inaugurated nationwide and more than 200,000 patients were treated, achieving cure rates in line with global estimates," said Dr Gamal Essmat, a professor of gastroenterology and liver diseases, Cairo University.

Dr Mohamed Kamal Shaker, professor of gastroenterology at Ain Shams University, mentioned the society's efforts to promote early detection. "To date, liver cancer screening is implemented across nine interferon treatment centres and aims at covering the nation-wide network comprising 23 centres, whereby physicians are trained to screen for the disease and enter their findings into a consolidated database," he elaborated.



**Effective treatment:** ESLC members highlighted the targeted therapy of liver cancer during a press conference in Cairo.