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The Egyptian Society for Liver Cancer third annual conference reveals

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- The Egyptian Society for Liver Cancer (ESLC) held a press conference revealing highlights of its third annual meeting 'Hepatocellular Carcinoma: Current and Future Prospects'.

Participants discussed advances in liver cancer treatment, the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide, emphasized updates in targeted therapy offering for the first time evidence-based survival improvement and shed light on treatment guidelines.

"The burden of HCC has risen alarmingly in Egypt; incidence has more than doubled over the past 12 years from almost 4% in 1993 to 8.5% in 2005," said Dr Ashraf Omar, Professor of Gastroenterology, Cairo University, ESLC Secretary General and Conference President. "HCC in Egypt affects between 5 and 7 cases per 100,000 annually with a mortality rate of 6 per 100,000 reflecting a high disease fatality. Primary risk factors include hepatitis C, accounting for a large percentage of liver cancer cases, hepatitis B, dietary aflatoxin exposure, and chronic alcohol consumption."

Treatment options for liver cancer depend on the stage of the disease, liver functions and the patient's overall condition. In general, treatment options include surgery, radiology, cancer treatments and percutaneous ethanol injections.

"The discovery of RAF Kinase proteins, present in 60% - 80% of HCC cases, and their role in prompting tumor cells to grow or helping form new blood vessels is a treatment breakthrough," said Dr Hamdy Abdel Azim, Professor and Head of Oncology Department, Cairo University. "For the first time we have unequivocal evidence of a treatment that significantly improves advanced HCC patient survival. Sorafenib, a targeted therapy known as a kinase inhibitor helps stop the growth of cancer cells. Approved by the FDA and the EU as the first effective HCC treatment, over 600 late-stage HCC patients participated in the SHARP trial revealing that sorafenib increases one-year survival rates by 31% compared to the placebo group. Sorafenib also halted disease progress in 42% of cases. ESLC is currently working to raise these rates by undertaking a comprehensive study that is the first of its kind worldwide, the results of which are yet to be revealed."

Dr Ahmed El Dorry, Professor of Interventional Radiology, Ain Shams University and ESLC President, highlighted another development in treatment options, "ESLC successfully introduced radio embolization in Egypt, a treatment in which radioactive particles are delivered to a tumor through the bloodstream emitting radiation that kills cancer cells. To further boost the efficacy of radio embolization, latest protocols combine it with targeted oral therapy."

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Dr Mohamed Kamal Shaker, Professor of Gastroenterology, Ain Shams University and ESLC President, shared the society's efforts to promote early detection, "To date, liver cancer screening is implemented across nine interferon treatment centers and aims to cover the nationwide network comprising 23 centers, whereby physicians are trained to screen for the disease and enter their findings into a consolidated database."

Elaborating on the importance of treatment guidelines, Dr Mohamed Aly Ezz El Arab, Head of the Cancer Treatment Unit at the National Liver Institute and ESLC Treasurer, said "Top liver experts participated in two ESLC conferences in 2011 to develop the Egyptian guidelines for the treatment of primary liver cancer. Aligned with global standards and taking into account local factors, the guidelines tackle means of prevention, early detection and diagnosis, and staging thereby recommending the appropriate treatment protocol whether by surgical intervention, radiation or liver therapies."

"Surgery remains the most effective treatment option for HCC patients," said Dr Mahmoud El Meteiny, Director of the Organ Transplantation Unit, Ain Shams University. "The past 10 years witnessed tremendous progress in HCC diagnosis and surgical treatment. In line with the Milan criteria for selecting liver transplantation patients, average four-year cure rates range from 75% to 80%."

Dr Gamal Esmat, Professor of Gastroenterology and Liver Diseases, Cairo University and Head of the National Committee for the Control of Viral Hepatitis shared the committee's efforts to eradicate viral hepatitis, "Preventing the spread of infection is the foundation of the Committee's efforts to eradicate hepatitis C and B, two main causes of liver cancer. Early detection and treatment are essential to prevent the disease from progressing to cirrhosis and liver tumors. Over the past five years, the National Committee made substantial strides toward achieving its mission; 23 treatment centers were inaugurated nationwide and more than 200,000 patients were treated achieving cure rates in line with global estimates."

Established in 2009, ESLC aims to develop HCC treatment guidelines, raise awareness, promote international collaboration, support prevention and early detection, and further continuous medical education. A recent ESLC milestone is the PATH program for the advancement of HCC therapy ensuring that local practices are aligned with the most up to date global developments.