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### 'Alarming increase' in most common liver cancer must be addressed: Doctors

Key risk factors for liver cancer are on the rise in Egypt though new treatments are saving lives, according to specialists  
*Ingy Deif, Saturday 3 Nov 2012*



Incidences of the most common type of liver cancer, Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC), have doubled in Egypt over the past 12 years, Dr Ashraf Omar, a professor of gastroenterology at Cairo University, told Ahram Online at a conference on the disease Wednesday.

The annual conference, which was organised by the Egyptian Society for Liver Cancer (ESLC) and chaired by Dr Omar, ESLC secretary-general, examined liver cancer, the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide, the "alarming" increase of HCC in Egypt, new treatments available, and the role of the media in combating the disease.

Dr Omar pointed out that statistics show that HCC is the cause of between five and seven per 100,000 cases annually with a mortality rate of six per 100,000, reflecting a high disease fatality. The number has recently increased to 10 cases per 100,000, which put Egypt into the upper intermediate category of prevalence.

Omar confirmed that primary risk factors have been on the rise in Egypt, including Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B, exposure to Aflatoxin, a fungus found on badly stored grains, diabetes, obesity, and chronic alcohol consumption.

#### Treatment options

The conference shed light on liver cancer treatment options, which include radiology, surgery, and ethanol injections, among others. It was underlined that the choice of

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treatment depends on many factors, mainly liver function, the general condition of the patient, and the stage of the disease.

Dr Hamdy Abdel Azim, professor and head of the Oncology Department at Cairo University talked about Sorafenib, a targeted therapy that helps stop the growth of cancer cells and, for the first time, significantly improves recovery chances for advanced HCC patients.

Approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the EU as the first effective HCC treatment, it increases one-year survival rates by 31 per cent compared to the placebo group.

Another development in treatment options was highlighted by Dr Ahmed El-Dorry, professor of interventional radiology at Ain Shams University and ESLC president, who said that the new treatment had been introduced in Egypt with notable success. The method relies on delivering radioactive particles to a tumor through the bloodstream, emitting radiation that kills cancer cells.

Finally, Dr Mahmoud El-Meteiny, director of the Organ Transplantation Unit at Ain Shams University, added that the surgery option is still the most effective treatment option for HCC patients, adding that in the last decade huge progress was made regarding HCC diagnosis and surgical treatment.

### Prevention remains the ultimate target

The ESLC was established in 2009 with specific targets, some of which are raising general awareness on liver cancer, developing HCC treatment guidelines, promoting cooperation between entities worldwide, and boosting efforts at prevention and early detection of the disease. The pillar of ESLC strategy is prevention and eradication of the disease in Egypt and the world.

Highlighting the importance of treatment guidelines that Egyptian liver experts developed to treat liver cancer in the primary stage, taking into consideration local factors, Dr Mohamed Aly Ezz El-Arab, head of the Cancer Treatment Unit at the National Liver Institute, said that the guidelines deal with prevention, early detection and diagnosis, and then staging the disease, giving emphasis to individual treatment for individual patients.

Prevention was the keyword also highlighted by Dr Gamal Esmat, professor of gastroenterology and liver diseases at Cairo University and head of the National Committee for the Control of Viral Hepatitis, who said that Hepatitis C and B are the two main causes of liver cancer, so the earlier they are detected and treated the better in terms of preventing the disease from developing into liver tumors.

Dr Esmat noted that through 23 treatment centres nationwide, the national committee has treated more than 200,000 patients,

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### Media can make a difference

The responsibility of the media to convey health messages and raise awareness was one of the focuses of the meeting Wednesday.

"Shocking statistics in 2008 show that in Egypt 20 per cent of the people have never heard about Virus C; four per cent only ever made a blood test in that regard, and 50 per cent only already knew about their infection and sought treatment — the others never bothered," Dr Esmat pointed out.

"In a country where Hepatitis C, which is a leading factor of liver cancer, has such prevalence, this is a catastrophe," he added. "This is where the role of the media comes in, which we as doctors regard as a major partner in the fight against liver cancer."