



health

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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International Childhood Cancer Awareness Day (ICCD) – 15 February

Pretoria: The Department of Health in collaboration with South African Children's Cancer Study Group and CHOC Childhood Cancer Foundation South Africa, join the global community in raising awareness about childhood cancer as part of the International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD).

The International Childhood Cancer Day is commemorated annually on February 15th to raise awareness about childhood cancer, recognise the early warning signs and to express support for children and adolescents living with cancer, together with the survivors and their families.

The 2022 campaign theme this year is **#throughyourhands** which aims to highlight the incredible individuals whose hands care for children and teens with cancer or life-threatening blood disorders. Just as these children are entrusted in the hands of the multi-disciplinary teams, every child's journey is also in our hands.

It is our responsibility to know the early warnings signs for swift detection to be able to refer patients timeously to specialised treatment and care and in doing so decrease the mortality and morbidity of cancer in children.

Each year, a distinct group of childhood cancer stakeholders is highlighted: **#throughourhands** giving tribute to children and adolescents with cancer (2021), **#throughyourhands** with focus on healthcare teams and volunteers (2022) and **#throughtheirhands** paying tribute to the families and caregivers (2023).

According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 400 000 children and adolescents of 0-19 years old develop cancer. Leukaemias, brain cancers, Lymphomas, and solid tumours, such as Neuroblastoma and Wilms tumours are the most common childhood cancers. Cure rates in High-Income Countries (HICs) with 20% of the world's children with cancer exceed 80%, while only 30% in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are cured.

The survival rate of childhood cancer in South Africa is around 55-60% and seems to be on the rise. Public health campaigns impact on early diagnosis and referral which translates into improved outcomes but may have limited impact on decreasing the incidence of paediatric malignancies are not related to modifiable risk factors. Dedicated centres for childhood cancer treatment requires specialised diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities, and the ability to manage complications.

Childhood cancer care should ideally be managed in a limited number of treatment centres in which resources and expertise are concentrated with good satellite centres who can deliver some treatment, thereby decreasing the burden on families, providing rapid management of complications, and decreasing abandonment of treatment.



It is essential to have individuals trained in paediatric oncology i.e., paediatric oncologists, surgeons, pathologists, radiation oncologists, radiologists, pharmacists, nurses, and allied care workers. Different childhood cancers require different treatment intensities for maximum cure rates; for example, the chemotherapy for Wilms tumour is far less intense than for acute Myeloid Leukaemia.

Every child and teenager who start their childhood cancer journey, have hope that their child will survive and live a long, happy, healthy, and fulfilled life. As a global childhood cancer community, we believe that increased awareness and accurate information and knowledge can empower all of us to recognize the early warning signs of childhood cancer, make informed choices about our children's health and counter fears and misconceptions about childhood cancer.

During the prevention, care, and management; as well as the rehabilitation and integration of survivors, there are many role-players that contribute to the success thereof.

On this day, we salute the healthcare workers, allied workers and NGOs whose tireless work positively impact on the lives of children and teens living with cancer. They are the voices of the families and give hope to the young cancer and their families to complete the cancer treatment. Together, and **#throughyourhands** we can reach the WHO Global Childhood Cancer Initiative of 60% survival rate by 2030 and reduce the suffering of the children.

Covid-19 has had a substantial impact on both those that treat and those who are treated. Leaving no one behind includes government's commitment to all children and their families including our most vulnerable children with non-communicable, long-term conditions. Let us amplify the visibility of childhood cancer at all levels and reach the breadth of stakeholders with the power to effect life-saving change.

Together, we can sustain and reinforce healthcare professionals in the fulfilment of their all-important role and make a positive difference for children and teenagers with cancer worldwide.

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