Minimising your risk of cancer - World Cancer Day

by Charmaine Gauci

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world. WHO estimated that 84 million people will die of cancer between 2005 and 2015 (without intervention). Each year on 4 February, WHO supports the International Union Against Cancer to promote ways to ease the global burden of cancer. Obviously, preventing cancer and raising quality of life for cancer patients are recurring themes. Local data from 1996-2008 show that there are increasing trends in incidence when all cancers are included together, for both genders. There were 401.2 new cases per 100,000 people during 2008. However the overall age-standardised-rate remains below the European average rate.

The commonest cancer in females are breast and in males colorectal cancer and prostate cancer. Locally, there were 837 deaths from these cancers in 2009. It has been estimated that more than 30% of cancer deaths can be prevented. Many aspects of general health can be improved, and certain cancers avoided, if one adopts a healthier lifestyle.

Key points which one should communicate to patients include:

1. Do not smoke. Smoking is the largest single cause of premature death;
2. Keep a healthy weight;
3. Undertake brisk physical activity every day;
4. Make sure you consume a variety of fruit and vegetables eating at least five servings daily. You need to reduce intake of animal fat;
5. If you drink alcohol, whether beer, wine or spirits, moderate your consumption to a minimum;
6. Care must be taken to avoid excessive sun exposure. It is specifically important to protect children and adolescents. For individuals who have a tendency to burn in the sun active protective measures must be taken throughout life;
7. Apply strictly regulations aimed at preventing any exposure to known cancer-causing substances. Follow all health and safety instructions on substances which may cause cancer.

The Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care will shortly be launching the National Cancer Plan 2011-2015. The overarching purpose of this plan is to reduce incidence, prolong survival and ensure the best quality of life possible for cancer patients.

Material to help you promote well being and prevention of illness can be obtained from the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate by calling on 23266000.