

TAMIL NADU

# 'Early detection can prevent cancer'



STAFF REPORTER

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Expert speak Anukanth Anumanathan, researcher from Harvard Medical School, delivering a talk on cancer care to teachers of Sivananda Balalaya in the city on Thursday. — Photo:M.Srinath.

Early detection is the key to prevention and control of cancer has been the message reiterated by the medical community. But how early can we detect cancer is a pertinent question.

The time frame for combating cancer is limited once the cells are detected. Though a small percentage of cancer cells are required for detection of the disease, it takes but little time for the cells to develop into full blown cancer, says Anukanth Anumanathan, a researcher with 10 years of cancer research to his credit at Harvard Medical School.

Though 99.9 per cent of cancer cells can be destroyed through various treatments, residual cells are always left over and develop into full-blown cancer in three months.

The researcher at the helm of Anuram Research Institute, set up by American Indian scientists, believes cancer can be prevented in the future. The answer lies in antibodies for cancer. “The most number of drugs passed through the Food and Drug Administration, the top authority for drug control in the U.S, are antibodies,” said Mr. Anumanathan. “For, antibodies are very specific than any other form of treatment.”

Pointing out that one of the major disadvantages in chemotherapy was the destruction of immune cells along with cancerous cells, he said it was dangerous as individuals may lose capacity to resist a disease when immune cells are terminated. Besides, there is not much difference in growth of cancer cells and immune cells.

With invention of newer technologies, it is possible to treat cancer with antibodies and sequencing specific genes. In fact, it would be possible to block cancer in the future if specific disease-causing genes are identified. By comparing cancerous cells and immune cells through research, cancer markers can be identified. Immune cells can be re-injected after they are equipped with identifying and destroying cancerous cells.

Cancer research in India cannot be compared to America though China is better off. India is greatly lagging behind and was not part of genome sequencing project that is key to personalised system of medicine.

More scientists with passion for discovery and aptitude for research are required to take cancer research on an equal footing with United States. Research work of many Indian scientists in the U.S was aggregated by American institutes. Scientists must also lobby with government for more funding. Though advanced treatment is available, molecular treatment is way behind, he noted.

He interacted with teachers at Sivananda Balalaya on cancer treatment methods.