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Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



World Health
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JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
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Childhood Cancer Awareness Month: 01- 31 September

Pretoria: The Department of Health in collaboration with various local and international stakeholders including CHOC Childhood Cancer Foundation South Africa and the World Health Organization (WHO) will spend the month of September creating awareness of the impact of cancer in many children and their families around the country to ensure children with childhood cancer in South Africa are diagnosed early for successful treatment.

Childhood cancer is one of the leading causes of disease-related death past infancy in children and adolescents. Several barriers impede the early diagnosis and referral of the child with cancer to treatment centres. Myths and stigmas surrounding the cause of childhood cancer is a major barrier to families seeking medical care timeously.

Lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown drives the myths, fallacies and stigmas surrounding childhood cancer resulting in missed diagnoses or presentation with advanced disease which negatively impacts outcome. We must educate our communities and primary health care workers that children do get cancer, can be treated, and cured.

In high -income countries with 20% of the world's children with cancer, survival rates are more than 80% while the situation is different in low- and middle-income countries where survival is as low as 20-30%. Fortunately, children with cancer in South Africa have much better outcomes of between 55-60%.

According to Professor Gita Naidu, chair of South African Association of Paediatric Haematology Oncology, South Africa aligns with the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (WHO-GICC), which aims to increase the survival of children and adolescents with cancer globally. We need to focus on early diagnosis, referral to specialised treatment centres, ensure access to diagnostics and therapeutics, and emphasise quality of life, supportive, long-term follow-up, and palliative care.

The WHO-GICC established in 2018, brings together stakeholders from around the world and across sectors with the joint goal of increasing the survival rate of children with cancer globally to at least 60% by 2030.





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The initiative is guided by **CureAll**, a strategic and practical approach that involves **C**enters of excellence and care with a sufficient and competent workforce to increase capacity to deliver services; **U**niversal health coverage that ensures access to essential medicines, diagnostics, and technologies; **R**esearch and innovation that generate evidence-based solutions for local contexts; and lastly **E**mpowerment of patients, families, and communities through education, awareness, and advocacy.

Hedley Lewis, CHOC CEO calls on South Africans to unite and **#GiveSomeHope** as we work together to achieve the WHO's target to ensure at least 60% survival in low- and middle-income countries and to reduce suffering of all children with cancer by 2030 worldwide.

Dr Kibachio Joseph Mwangi, the Medical Officer responsible for Non-Communicable Diseases at the WHO, South Africa notes that the poor outcome of childhood cancer management in low- and middle-income countries is primarily driven by delays in diagnosis, inaccurate diagnosis, inaccessible therapy, abandonment of treatment, death from toxicity (side effects), and relapse. Dr Mwangi reckons that the current partnership with the WHO-GICC can lead to improved outcomes for children with cancer by focusing on a prompt, correct diagnosis followed by evidence-based therapy.

The department stresses the importance the St Siluan warning signs of childhood cancer which can be accessed at <https://choc.org.za/childhood-cancer-early-warning-signs/>.

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