

## ***Understanding Cancer Incidence in Punjab and the Role of Integrative Medicine***

***- Dr. Ashish Gulia,***

*During the National Conference on Integrative Cancer Care (NCICC) 2024, I had the opportunity to share my thoughts on the alarming cancer rates in Punjab and explore the broader implications of urbanization and lifestyle changes on cancer incidence across India. In this article, I want to delve into the factors contributing to the rise in cancer cases and discuss the potential role of Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM) in providing holistic cancer care.*

### ***The Cancer Train Phenomenon in Punjab***

*You may have heard about the "cancer train" in Punjab—a term used to describe the significant number of cancer patients traveling from Punjab to Bikaner for treatment. This phenomenon is closely linked to the region's rapid urbanization and the affluence that accompanies it. Urbanization has brought about lifestyle changes, dietary shifts, and increased exposure to environmental factors, all of which contribute to a higher cancer risk.*

*In Punjab, what we are witnessing is not merely a consequence of pesticide use, as is often believed, but rather the impact of urbanization and the affluence that comes with it. Every village in Punjab, even in the interiors, enjoys a similar level of development, which has made the region's cancer incidence rates comparable to those in more urbanized areas.*

*Currently, in India, one out of nine people is likely to develop cancer in their lifetime, with approximately 14 lakh new cancer cases reported annually. This incidence varies between rural and urban areas, with urban areas experiencing higher rates due to factors such as diet, sedentary lifestyles, and exposure to pollutants.*

*Urbanization brings changes in our habits, what we eat, and how we live, leading to an increase in cancer cases. It's important to recognize that these lifestyle factors, rather than specific environmental toxins, are driving the higher incidence of cancer in regions like Punjab.*

### ***The Role of Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM)***

*Moving beyond the discussion of cancer incidence, I want to introduce the concept of Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine (TCIM), which is becoming increasingly important in cancer care. I have seen firsthand how Sanjeevani Life Beyond Cancer is doing remarkable work in promoting integrative care, and I am pleased to share that institutions like Tata Memorial Hospital are beginning to incorporate Ayurvedic and other complementary practices alongside conventional allopathic treatments.*

*The goal of integrative medicine is not to replace conventional cancer treatments but to enhance them. By addressing the psychological, emotional, and physical side effects, we can help patients complete their treatments more effectively and improve their overall well-being.*

*In fact, ongoing research suggests that practices such as yoga can significantly improve a patient's immune response and mental health, thereby enhancing the overall treatment experience. We have seen that integrating practices like yoga not only boosts immunity but also helps patients approach their treatment with a more positive mindset, leading to better outcomes.*

*As our understanding of integrative medicine evolves, I believe there will be a shift towards more holistic cancer care models. These models will not only focus on the medical aspects of treatment but will also integrate psychological support, stress management techniques, and traditional practices like Ayurveda and yoga. This approach will result in more comprehensive and patient-centered care.*

### **Looking Ahead: The Future of Integrative Cancer Care**

*Looking forward, I envision a future where integrative medicine experts become an essential part of cancer treatment teams. These teams will include not only oncologists and surgeons but also specialists in integrative medicine who can offer a holistic treatment plan. This approach will lead to better patient outcomes, reduced side effects from conventional treatments, and an overall improvement in the quality of life for cancer patients.*

*In the future, I believe we will see integrative medicine experts as essential members of cancer treatment teams. These experts will help ensure that patients receive not just medical treatment but also the psychological and emotional support they need to navigate their cancer journey.*

*We are at a pivotal moment in cancer care, where integrating traditional and modern practices can truly transform patient outcomes. By embracing this holistic approach, we can offer patients the comprehensive care they deserve and improve their chances of recovery and long-term well-being.*

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