



Battle against deadly lifestyle diseases continue

About 70% of death occurs due to lifestyle diseases

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Lifestyle in Bhutan is constantly transforming, albeit not for the better. This is because lifestyle diseases still continue to be the major cause of mortality in the country, according to the medical record maintained by the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JD-WNRH).

About 70% of patients' deaths that occur in the country are due to lifestyle diseases such as cancer, alcohol liver diseases, chronic renal failure (kidney failure) and diabetes.

The public health director under the Ministry of Health (MoH), Dr Ugen Dophu, said lifestyle diseases are preventable if a person avoids the risk factors.

"Lifestyle diseases take years to develop and once encountered it is not easy to cure. It is almost like a lifelong disease," he said.

The JDWNR medical record shows that from January till November 2011, total mortality reported from across the country is 639.

Of the total death cases, the highest cases of death is because of cancer with 87, followed by alcohol liver diseases with 66 cases, 35 cases from chronic renal failure, 25 due to pneumonia and 22 cases due to diabetes.

Bhutanese diet, lack of physical exercises, alcohol and tobacco products are the main risk factors of lifestyle diseases, according to doctors at the JDWNRH,

An official from JDWNRH said stomach, liver and larynx (respiratory tract) cancers are the most common cause of mortality in the country.

In an earlier interview with BT, a cancer



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surgeon at JDWNRH, Dr Tashi Dendup, said stomach cancer affect more people than any other cancer, but it can be cured if it is found and treated at an early stage.

"But many of the cancer patients seek medical help when they are at an advance stage of cancer. Bhutanese people take in high salted products, preserved products, fried and over roasted edibles which is the main cause of stomach cancer," he said.

Although the alcohol liver disease is also one of the major causes of death in the country, it is preventable. The disease is said to be caused because of excessive consumption of alcohol which is common in Bhutan.

"It's a Bhutanese culture, but the amount of alcohol that Bhutanese people are abusing is very high. It was and it is the biggest problem in the country. We really need to change and say no to alcohol," said Laigden Dzed, a dietician at the JDWNRH.

"Diabetes is a huge problem everywhere in the world. The num-

ber of patients visiting the hospital has been increasing over the years. The core reason is due to change in lifestyle. People take in excess calories now which thus lead to overweight (lots of body fats) and they become inactive," he said.

He added that diabetes is one of the leading causes of diseases like kidney failure, heart related diseases, blood vessel complications and sometimes blindness too.

Lifestyle disease is not

just a killer disease in the country, but it is also the disease that continues to create a huge dent on the government exchequer every year.

According to Dr Ugen Dophu, the minimum amount spent by the government on the kidney transplant is about Nu 700,000 to Nu 800,000 per patient excluding other expenditure.

"The amount spent on patients referred outside is mostly those suffering

from lifestyle diseases. It's expensive, and also a huge burden and concern to the government," he said.

Dr Ugen Dophu advised that people should listen to whatever health messages that they are provided with and change their lifestyle accordingly.

"If it is not done then the problem of lifestyle diseases will keep on increasing," he said.

The MoH report on patient referral to India from July 2010 to June 2011 shows that out of the 1,024 patients referred outside, 265 were cancer patients and 197 were referred for surgery. The total expenditure incurred for the overall patient referral was Nu 105,353,078.

The dietician said a huge chunk of money is spent on referral patients and in providing treatment to these patients continuously.

"Healthcare system in Bhutan is free right now, but the possibility of maintaining a free healthcare system in future would be very difficult if these diseases keep on increasing," he said.

