



**'DISPEL DAMAGING MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CANCER', A STATEMENT PRESENTED ON THE FLOOR OF PARLIAMENT BY HON. COLLINS NTIM, DEPUTY RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND MP FOR OFINSO NORTH CONSTITUENCY TO MARK THE WORLD CANCER DAY.**

Mr. Speaker, today, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2014, we join the rest of the world in commemorating World Cancer Day under the theme: 'Dispel damaging myths and misconceptions about cancer', under the tagline "Debunk the myths".

Mr. Speaker, the theme draws attention to the crucial need to improve awareness and knowledge about cancer and its risk factors to better protect individuals and communities. It is only through education that the myths surrounding cancer can be dispelled.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about cancer and we need to know the truth to better protect ourselves. Mr. Speaker, Cancer is not caused by an injury, such as a bump or a bruise. Cancer is not contagious. Although infections by certain viruses or bacteria may increase the risk of some types of cancer, no one can get cancer from another person. It is important to know the real facts about cancer prevention and control and that is why awareness day like today is very important.

Mr. Speaker, this day helps cancer patients to build resilience and hope. On this day, we should be united and show solidarity to cancer patients and help fight against cancer which has emerged as a serious public health concern over the past decades.

Cancer, Mr. Speaker, is a large group of different diseases, all involving unregulated cell growth. In cancer, cells divide and grow uncontrollably, forming malignant tumours, and invade nearby parts of the body. The cancer may also spread to more distant parts of the body through the lymphatic system or bloodstream. It is important to state that not all tumours are cancerous.

Mr. Speaker, the causes of cancer have been grouped into three, the first is Physical carcinogens, such as ultraviolet and ionizing radiation, the second is chemical carcinogens, such as asbestos, components of tobacco smoke,

aflatoxin (a food contaminant) and arsenic (a drinking water contaminant) Mr. Speaker, whilst urging our farmers on for their good work, I would like to encourage them especially farmers in Ofinso North to wear protective cloths to avoid chemical carcinogens. The third is biological carcinogens, such as infections from certain viruses, bacteria or parasites.

Mr. Speaker, Tobacco use, alcohol use, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity are the main cancer risk factors worldwide. Physical inactivity is one risk factor for non-communicable diseases, which is modifiable and therefore of great potential public health significance. Changing the level of physical activity raises challenges for the individual but also at societal level,” said Chris Wild, the director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC),

Mr. Speaker, the burden of cancer in Africa is huge and is increasing. According to World Health Organisation Director for Africa, Dr. Luis Sambo, the World Health Organization estimates that in 2008, there were 681 000 new cases of cancer in Africa, and 512 000 people died of the disease.

It is projected that, should the current trend continue, then by 2030, these figures will rise to 1.6 million new cases with 1.2 million deaths. According to Dr. Kofi Mensah Nyarko, the Program’s Manager for Non Communicable Disease Control Program, of the Disease Control and prevention department of Ghana Health Service about 16,000 new cases of cancer occur every year in Ghana. This trend is mainly related to rapid urbanization, unhealthy work environments, and the use of child labour which increases exposure to cancer-causing factors. Knowledge about the causes of cancer, and interventions to prevent and manage the disease is crucial.

Mr. Speaker, Cancer can be reduced and controlled by implementing evidence-based strategies for cancer prevention, early detection of cancer and management of patients with cancer. Mr. Speaker, Many cancers have a high chance of cure if detected early and treated adequately. Screening which is the systematic application of a test in an asymptomatic population undoubtedly is important in curbing the disease.

Screening aims to identify individuals with abnormalities suggestive of a specific cancer or pre-cancer and refer them promptly for diagnosis and treatment. Screening programmes are especially effective for frequent cancer



types for which a cost-effective, affordable, acceptable and accessible screening test is available to the majority of the population at risk.

The major Cancers in Ghana are Breast and Cervical Cancer for Women while Prostate and Liver cancer are the predominate cancer in men. Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) should be offered at all health facilities while mammograms should be available at all regional hospitals for Breast Screening as is outlined in the National Strategy for Cancer Control in Ghana. Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) with cryotherapy should be available for cervical cancer screening at all district and regional hospital while prostate cancer screening should be made accessible to all eligible men.

Mr. Speaker, Cancer treatment requires a careful selection of one or more intervention, such as surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy. The goal is to cure the disease or considerably prolong life while improving the patient's quality of life. Cancer diagnosis and treatment is complemented by psychological support.

Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate world cancer day today, I want to plead with Ghanaians to be responsible for their health by avoiding lifestyle induced diseases like poor eating habit, excessive alcohol and sexual immorality. Again people and communities to learn more and be better informed as this is the key to reducing the chances of developing and dying from the disease.

As we commemorate World Cancer Day, I call on all Ministers of Health especially in the continent to strengthen capacities for screening and early diagnosis by establishing cancer screening units at the primary health care centres and also providing treatment for cancers at the specialized centres.

Governments and development partners have a shared responsibility to raise awareness to dispel myths and misconceptions and to foster changes in lifestyles and behaviours related to cancer risk factors. Mr. Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to congratulate World Health Organisation and the Chief Executive Officer of Peace and Love Hospital, Dr. Beatrice Wiafe Addai for their efforts in raising awareness about breast and cervical cancer in the continent.

Thank you once again Mr. Speaker, for given me this wonderful opportunity.