

Over 100 cancer centers come together for the 7th National Cancer Grid meet for the first time

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The National Cancer Grid (NCG), with the support of Tata Trusts, has announced a major initiative of facilitating a high bandwidth, secure and private network through which cancer care centres around the country can interact directly with other centres, thus enabling inter-centre knowledge sharing and providing access to multiple solutions like Virtual Tumor Board, Digital Nerve Centre and many more.

The NCG at present comprises 108 centres, which account for about 60% of the cancer load of the country.

A first-of-its-kind initiative in India and perhaps globally, the NCG, launched in 2012 with the mandate of linking cancer centres across India, held its seventh meeting on May 20th and 21st at the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai, with over 150 participants from 108 centres across the country.

The NCG's primary mandate is uniform standards of cancer care across India by adopting evidence-based management guidelines, which are implemented across these centres. It is also intended to facilitate the exchange of expertise between centres and create a ready network for collaborative research in cancer.

The development of a "Travelling School of Pathology", aimed at bringing training in quality cancer diagnosis to the doorsteps of pathologists in far flung areas, was piloted this year for Pathology covering 12 cities in North-Eastern India and the results were shared at this forum. This is slated for replication in other parts of the country in the coming years. Navya, NCG's second opinion engine has provided 10000 opinions to patients across 22 countries, and has gone a long way in making expert cancer care available regardless of distances.

Several breakout sessions were organized in order to plan for the major short term and long term initiatives to be taken up by NCG like Palliative Care provision and training, Health Promotion and Awareness, Human Resource Development in Oncology and Health Technology Assessment. There was a consensus on holding more frequent Virtual Tumor Boards - which allow access to the 'collective intelligence' of the participating centres in diagnosis and treatment of live cases, by assigning member centres of NCG as hubs for different type of cancers.

Collaborative research was a key area of focus and accelerating cancer research in India was made a priority for NCG. Several initiatives have been taken by the NCG to promote cancer research training amongst oncologists. In addition, the NCG plans to establish five clinical trials units across India to help researchers with the logistics of conducting cancer research.

On the second day of the 2-day event, Dr Pramod Verma, chief architect, UIDAI, demonstrated how NCG member hospitals can benefit from the use of new features like Digilocker and digitization of birth and death records using the unique Aadhar identification number, in providing easy access to patients' records and improving outcomes. The Digital Nerve centre, an initiative of TCS, Tata Trusts and the NCG was launched on the second day in the presence of Dr. Sekhar Basu, Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy, Mr. N. Chandrasekaran, Chairman, Tata Sons, Mr. R. Venkataramanan, Managing Trustee, Tata Trusts. This application is to be piloted in four cancer centres - Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai, Tata Medical Center, Kolkata, Adyar Cancer

Institute, Chennai and RCC Trivandrum in the coming year and is slated to improve in-hospital patient experience significantly.

Dr C S Pramesh, professor and chief, Thoracic Surgery, Tata Memorial Hospital, and convenor of NCG, said, "The National Cancer Grid this year has grown to 108 institutes and treats perhaps 60% of the entire cancer load of the country. The priorities that have emerged this year are appropriate use of technology, training and collaborative research. A significant milestone was the re lease of NCG guidelines of care, a critical first step in eliminating disparities in cancer care"

Dr R A Badwe, Director, Tata Memorial Centre, welcoming the participant centres said, "The National Cancer Grid has made some significant strides this year. The potential of using this network to standardize quality of care and initiating research is endless. The guidelines for standards of care now need to define a minimum and an optimum and an optional level which will enable decisions based on the 'value' of an intervention"

Dr. Sekhar Basu, Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy, which funds the NCG, speaking at the launch of the Digital Nerve Centre, complimented the NCG for its efforts and observed that the Digital Nerve Centre would enable patients to access the right information on the experts to approach and connect them to the expert as well.