

# Lung cancer: Global transformative action needed

By [Esra Erkomay](#)

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Lung cancer, once rare, is now the highest cause of mortality of cancer worldwide. Responsible for more fatalities than breast, colon, and prostate cancers combined, it claims a life every 18 seconds. In recent years, wealthier countries have recently experienced a significant decline in lung cancer mortality, but in most of the Middle East and Africa incidence and mortality remains high.



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Shockingly, this devastating disease claims a life every 18 seconds. While wealthier nations have witnessed a decline in lung cancer mortality in recent years, the Middle East and Africa continue to grapple with persistently high incidence and mortality rates.

It is challenging to gather precise figures on the number of people living with lung cancer in the region, but most recent studies show there were at least 120,000 new cases in 2018, with numbers predicted to have grown since then.

Its strong association with tobacco-use leads many people to assume that lung cancer is a condition that only affects smokers. But this is a misperception. Though smoking increases your risk of the disease, anyone can get lung cancer.

The years of life lost to premature deaths, the economic burden of lost productivity and treatment costs, and the long-term effects of illness and treatment on the quality of life of patients and survivors all combine to make lung cancer a serious public-health challenge.

Our approach to this devastating disease in the Middle East and Africa must change if we are to save lives and improve the overall resilience and sustainability of our health systems.

## Three key approaches for governments

Raising awareness of lung cancer is an important opportunity to collectively push for transformative action. Alongside prioritising lung cancer in national cancer control programmes and investing in cancer registries to collect sufficient data on the disease, there are three approaches that governments can take to achieve this.

Firstly, screening for lung cancer must be expanded, focusing on high-risk groups. As noted in a 2021 report developed for the Lung Ambition Alliance, nearly a quarter of lung-cancer deaths in high-risk populations could be prevented through screening.



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It is encouraging to note that advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are making screening more accessible and efficient than ever before. To ensure that emerging economies also benefit from these new technologies, AstraZeneca has joined forces with deep-learning developers Qure.ai to integrate AI diagnostics in the early detection of lung cancer in Turkey, the Gulf, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and South Africa.

With 30,000 scans already completed in these countries, the partnership aims to increase lung-cancer detection at an earlier stage – improving the patient journey and ultimately reducing lung-cancer mortality rates.

Secondly, cross-border collaboration can help change how we detect and treat lung cancer. Learning from each other's experiences and mistakes is better for patients and healthcare budgets.

## Bridging health ecosystems

Initiatives like Cancer Care Africa, launched in November last year provide valuable insights and build cross-border health ecosystems that address the challenges associated with cancer, including lung cancer.

Already, Cancer Care Africa is creating an educational bridge between health care professionals in Egypt and Kenya who work on lung and other cancers, with thousands of health workers benefitting from in-person and virtual peer-to-peer learning which it is hoped can eventually be replicated across the continent.



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Finally, sustainability must be at the heart of our health systems. Research indicates that nearly one in 10 cases of lung cancer are caused by outdoor air pollution, which means building environmentally friendly health-ecosystems can directly benefit lung-cancer outcomes.

Added to that, prevention and early-detection programmes save significant resources and energy in the long run, as can new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual appointments.

This year's Cop28 in the UAE is a critical opportunity to strengthen ties between climate and health, and it is exciting to see health firmly on the agenda. By building sustainable health systems, we can ensure equitable access to lung-cancer care for all, and vice versa.

On this World Lung Cancer Day, we call on governments, healthcare providers, the private sector, and NGOs to renew their approach to lung cancer in the Middle East and Africa region.

The burden of this disease is formidable, and our collective response must rise to meet it. By implementing effective screening programmes, fostering cross-border collaboration, and investing in sustainable health systems, we can reverse the trajectory of lung cancer and provide hope for patients. Let us unite in the fight against lung cancer and strive for a future where this devastating disease no longer claims the lives of so many.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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