

Spotlight

By Caroline Seydel

Trends in Cancer Incidence in the Tunisian Population

Missaoui et al.

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Are changing habits in developing countries altering cancer rates among the population, as people increase tobacco use, societies become industrialized, and a westernized diet and lifestyle takes hold? Population-based cancer registries could provide a valuable tool for monitoring cancer trends. Missaoui, *et al.*, analyzed data from a 14-year period to identify changing cancer rates in Tunisia, the better to plan strategies for fighting the disease.

In Tunisia, a population-based cancer registry was established in 1987, and the data collected appear quite reliable. Of the cases reported, 97% were histologically or cytologically verified, a rate much higher than that in other African cancer registries and comparable to that of many North American or European registries.

In this study, the authors combed through data collected from 1993 to 2006 to identify trends in cancer incidence. Lung cancer occurs most frequently, they found, mostly caused by cigarette smoking. Approximately 1.7 million Tunisians currently smoke, and in 2009 the Tunisian Ministry of Public Health launched an anti-smoking campaign. In women, breast cancer accounts for almost 30% of cancers, on the rise during the 14-year period. This change may reflect the increase in age of first childbirth and number of children, or changes in diet and exercise habits. Both colorectal and prostate cancer are on the rise, too.

For years, the Algerian cancer registry was the only one in North Africa, but recently others have been started up, including the one in Tunisia. Now, the analysis of these and other cancer trends could pave the way for improved cancer prevention programs in Tunisia.