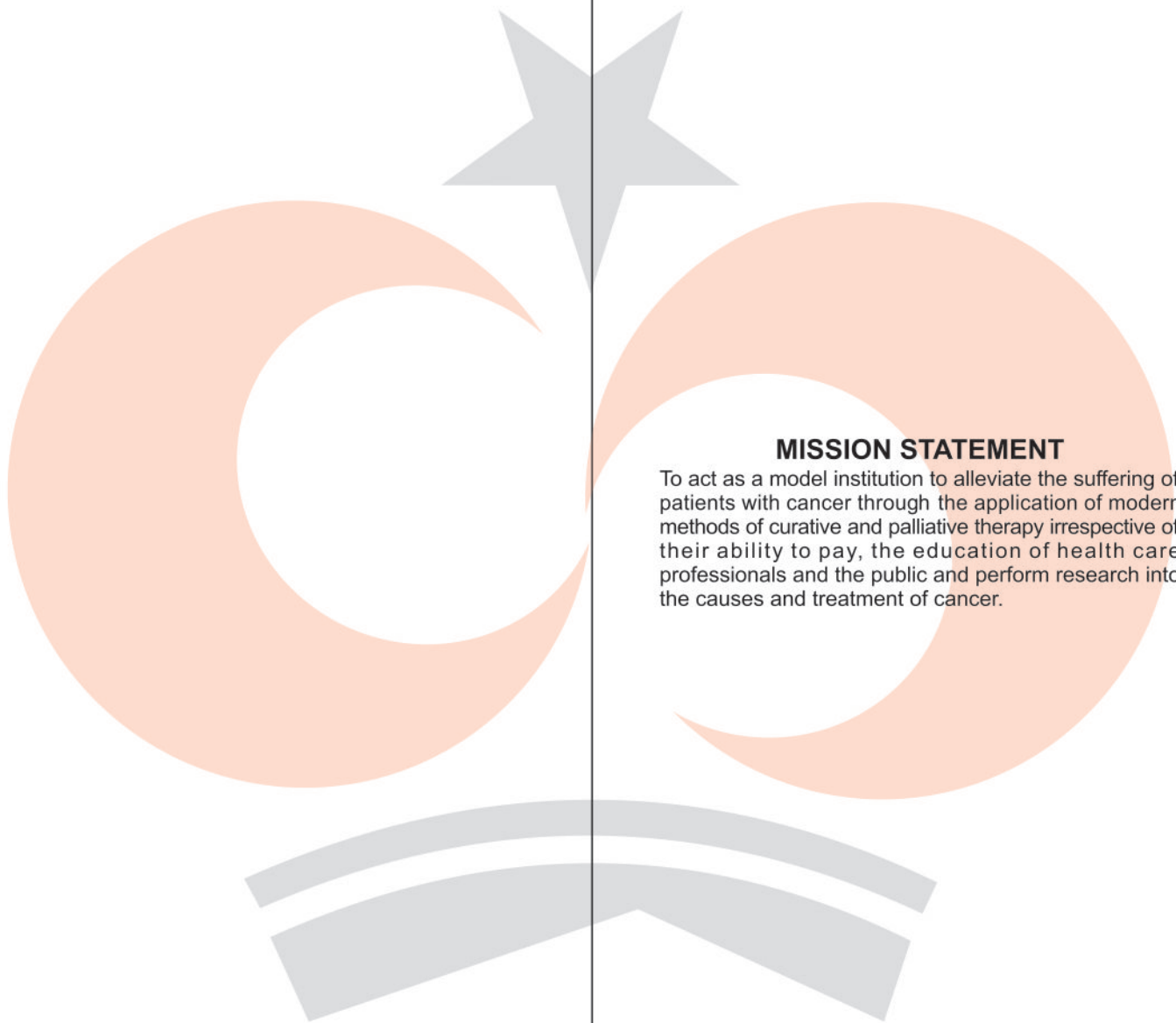


HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT CANCER



MISSION STATEMENT

To act as a model institution to alleviate the suffering of patients with cancer through the application of modern methods of curative and palliative therapy irrespective of their ability to pay, the education of health care professionals and the public and perform research into the causes and treatment of cancer.

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Learning that your child has cancer is perhaps the hardest news you will ever have to face. As a parent, you must now decide how to tell your child. The questions that many parents ask are: "What should my child be told?" You probably already are asking, "Should I tell my child about the cancer at all?" In the past children were often shielded from such news but studies now show that most children know they have a serious illness despite attempts of parents and health care workers to protect them.

Most likely, your child already suspects that something is wrong. He or she may not feel well, is seeing the doctor more often, and has had some uncomfortable and frightening tests. Your child also may sense the anxiety and fears of family members and close friends.

Like adults, children with cancer feel uncertain, anxious, and afraid at times. But, unlike many adults, children often are not able to talk about their fears. Instead, they may express their feelings by being unpleasant or bossy, or by being quieter than usual. As a parent, you should know how your child usually behaves, so you will probably be the first to notice any differences. Playing is a way for your child to express and reduce fears and anxieties, and you should encourage it. Drawing pictures and playing with puppets, dolls, and even medical supplies are ways children may show that they do not understand what is happening or that they need more reassurance and love.

Some children find it hard to express their feelings. These children may have nightmares or eating or behavioural difficulties. Some children resume behaviours that they had out grown, such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking. You should talk about these things with your child's doctor, nurse or psychologist.

Remember that through the years, you as a parent have already developed a sixth sense about your child. You do not need to look for problems in the way your child

behaves. If problems exist, they will be obvious to you. Also, remember your child's doctor, nurse and psychologist have had experience with situations like yours and are willing to help.

TIPS FOR REASSURING YOUR CHILD DURING THE CANCER DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- Remind your child that the cancer is not caused by anything he or she did. Neither the disease nor the treatment is a punishment.
- Be honest and realistic in your explanations of procedures and treatments. Let your child know about any change in treatment.
- Nobody, not even your child, expects you to know everything. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." If your child has questions that you cannot answer, tell him or her that you will try to find the answers.
- Do not be afraid to ask your child questions. Asking children what they are thinking and feeling does not create new fears; it gives them the chance to express the fears they already have.
- Tell your child that it is okay to feel sad and cry. This provides an outlet for emotions.
- Let your child have some control as long as it does not harm his or her health or interfere with treatment. This allows your child to grow in spite of the needed restrictions.
- Encourage activities to reduce anxiety. Drawing or playing with puppets may help your child to express feelings. Therapeutic play with the play therapist or nurse can help young children better understand and adjust to their illness.
- Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings. Frequent family talks can help reducing anxiety. Talking

helps the whole family cope with this illness together.

- Recognise that children, like adults, have good days and bad days.
- Remember that your health care team is there to answer questions and give support to you and your family.
- Children, especially those younger than five years, worry about being separated from their parents. Reassure your child that even though you have to leave, you love him or her and will return as soon as you can.
- Help your child keep in touch with friends, family members, and schoolmates while away from school. This tells your child that he or she is still a normal kid with friends, interests and responsibilities.
- Encourage your child to do some studies even if your child is unable to go school.
- Despite all that is going on, your child is the same person as before, with the same emotional needs as any other growing child. Take some time each day to love and enjoy each other's company as much as you can. Talking with a child about cancer is not easy. We hope this information has given you some helpful tips. You can also use these ideas when talking with your child's brothers, sisters, and friends.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have further questions or concerns, please contact the Paediatric Unit in Inpatient II at +92 42 3590 5000 Ext. 2292 or Paediatric Nursing at the Chemo Bay at +92 42 3590 5000 Ext. 5012 or 5013 from Monday thru Friday, 8:00am to 5:00 pm.