

Deepanjan Mitra speaks at the Association of Nuclear Medicine Physicians of India Conference

Cancer care gets nuclear medicine boost

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Calcutta: More than 200 nuclear medicine specialists from across India are in Calcutta for a conference to discuss the expanding role of nuclear medicine in targeted therapies, precision medicine and cancer treatment where conventional therapies fail.

The 24th edition of the Association of Nuclear Medicine Physicians of India Conference (ANMPICON) was inaugurated by health minister Sharadwat Mukherjee and junior minister for youth affairs and sports, Indranil Khan, on Friday.

"We are moving beyond simply asking where the disease is. We are increasingly asking what the disease is at a molecular level and how we can use that knowledge to provide more precise and personalised treatment," said Deepanjan Mitra, organising secretary of the conference.

Nuclear medicine is a branch of medicine in which physicians use radiopharmaceuticals for diagnosis and treatment. The conference is also discussing the transition towards theranostics, which combines diagnostic imaging with targeted therapy.

Among the eminent nuclear medicine physicians attending the conference are association president Indirani M. from Chennai; Parag Aland from Mumbai, who spoke on artificial intelligence in nuclear medicine; and Ishita Sen from Gurgaon, who addressed the conference on recent advances in liver cancer treatment.

A panel discussion on the regulatory aspects of nuclear medicine was held on Saturday.

Mitra said patients with advanced prostate cancer were increasingly opting for PSMA (prostate-specific membrane antigen) therapy when conventional treatment failed.

In thyroid cancer, patients are administered radioactive iodine after surgery instead of conventional chemotherapy or radiotherapy. "The iodine emits rays, and those rays kill the cancer cells," said Mitra, head of nuclear medicine at North City Diagnostic.

"There is significant information that a CT or MRI provides, but there is certain adjunct or supplementary information that a PET-CT provides for more precise treatment planning, staging of the disease or evaluating the response to cancer treatment," said Soumendranath Ray, organising chairperson of the conference.

Over the first two days, the conference discussed the growth of nuclear medicine in the city.

In 2010, there was hardly one PET-CT machine in the city for patients not only from eastern India but also from Bangladesh and Nepal.

"Now there are as many as 30 PET-CT machines in the city," Mitra said.

Nuclear medicine uses physiological imaging to detect diseases earlier than conventional modalities such as CT or MRI.

While nuclear medicine is key to many cancer treatments, physicians rued the shortage of nuclear medicine specialists.