



Editorial

Addressing Challenges Faced by CML Patients and Physicians in SAARC Countries

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Chronic myeloid leukemias (CML) present a significant healthcare challenge in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), with patients and physicians grappling with a myriad of issues ranging from access to quality care to financial burdens.

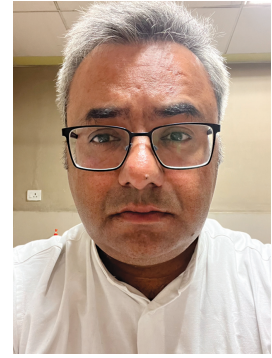
While advancements in treatment have improved outcomes for CML patients globally, these benefits have not been uniformly distributed across all regions. SAARC countries, in particular, face unique challenges that hinder the optimal management of this hematological malignancy. One of the primary obstacles confronting CML patients in this region is the limited access to specialized healthcare services and essential medications. Many areas need more healthcare infrastructure, resulting in long waiting times for diagnosis, treatment initiation, and follow-up care. Additionally, the high cost of CML medications, such as tyrosine kinase inhibitors, poses a significant barrier to access for patients from low- and middle-income backgrounds. India has been able to address this issue by and large by ensuring what can be best called bringing the cost of medication to as low as possible and, in most cases, ensuring that the provider provides medication without any cost to the patient. The Glivec International Patient Assistance Program (GIPAC) corporate initiative also needs to be appreciated.

Furthermore, the need for more awareness and education about CML among the general population and healthcare professionals exacerbates the problem. Misconceptions about the disease often lead to delayed diagnosis and inappropriate management, negatively impacting patient outcomes. Moreover, the need for more trained medical oncologists and hematologists in many countries of this region further limits the capacity to deliver specialized care to CML patients. Physicians managing CML for this reason face numerous challenges, including limited access to updated treatment. Keeping pace with rapidly evolving treatment paradigms in CML requires access to the latest

research findings and guidelines, which may only sometimes be readily available in resource-constrained settings.

Additionally, the need for standardized protocols for monitoring and managing treatment-related side effects can complicate patient care and contribute to suboptimal outcomes—most of the time, CML patients are treated by half-trained or self-proclaimed oncologists. Addressing the issues CML patients and physicians face here requires a multifaceted approach involving governments, healthcare organizations, pharmaceutical companies, and civil society. First, efforts should be made to improve access to affordable diagnostics, medications, and specialized healthcare services for CML patients. This may involve government subsidies, public-private partnerships, and initiatives to reduce the cost of essential medicines. Second, raising awareness about CML among healthcare professionals and the general public is crucial for early detection and optimal management. Educational campaigns, medical conferences, and training programs can help bridge the knowledge gap and improve the quality of care provided to CML patients.

Enhancing medical infrastructure and training opportunities for healthcare professionals specializing in hematology and oncology is essential for building capacity and improving patient outcomes. Collaboration with international organizations and institutions can facilitate knowledge exchange and skill development in the management of CML. In conclusion, addressing the challenges CML patients and physicians face in Southeast Asia requires concerted efforts from various stakeholders. By improving access to care, raising awareness, and enhancing medical infrastructure and training opportunities, we can work toward ensuring better outcomes for CML patients in the region. We must prioritize the needs of these patients and strive for equitable access to quality healthcare for all.



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Addressing these issues requires collaborative efforts from healthcare providers, policymakers, advocacy groups, and international organizations to improve access to care,

raise awareness, provide financial assistance, and enhance healthcare infrastructure and support services for CML patients in SAARC countries.