



Integrating Cancer Awareness into School Mental Health Programs

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) organised a webinar titled '*Integrating Cancer Awareness into School Mental Health Programs*' on 18th April 2025, as part of the Psychosocial Counselling Webinar Series. The webinar underscored the significant role of educational institutions in cultivating resilience, empathy, and informed awareness among young individuals regarding cancer. The central theme revolved around empowering students and educators with the knowledge and emotional tools necessary to challenge stigmas, offer support, and promote proactive health behaviours.

The webinar featured insightful contributions from several speakers, including Dr. Harit Chaturvedi – Chairman, Oncology, Max Hospitals; Ms. Megha Ahuja – Director, Vivekanand School and Founder, Sashakt – The Ovarian Cancer Foundation; Ms. Tripti Shinghal Somani – Founder, Wommenovator; Cancer Survivor; and Mr. Rajeev Khandelwal – Actor and Advisory Board Member, Sashakt. They highlighted various facets of integrating cancer awareness into the school environment.

The key takeaways from the webinar are as follows:

- **The Pivotal Role of Schools**

It was emphasised that schools serve as vital platforms for nurturing essential qualities such as resilience and empathy in students. The integration of cancer awareness initiatives within this setting can significantly contribute to a more supportive and understanding school community.

- **Empowering Students and Educators**

Speakers stressed that equipping both students and educators with accurate cancer information is crucial for fostering empathy and dispelling prevalent myths surrounding the disease. This empowerment enables a more informed and compassionate approach to those affected by cancer.

- **The Sashakt Cancer Life Skill Module**

A significant focus was placed on the *Sashakt Cancer Life Skill Module*. This module, as discussed by the panellists, is specifically designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge, emotional vocabulary, and empathetic understanding to challenge the stigma associated with cancer. The module aims to enable students to articulate their feelings related to cancer, address misconceptions, and learn effective ways to support individuals impacted by the illness.

- **Importance of Open Dialogue**

The panellists collectively advocated for the necessity of open and honest conversations about cancer within the school setting. This includes promoting awareness of early detection methods and encouraging the adoption of healthy lifestyle choices for prevention.

- **Reframing the Narrative in Media**

A compelling point was raised regarding the influence of the entertainment industry. Speakers urged a shift in the portrayal of cancer, from solely tragic narratives to also include stories of hope, resilience, and survival. This change in perspective can foster a more positive and empowering outlook.

- **The Role of Educators and Counsellors**

The crucial role of educators and school counsellors in cultivating a school culture characterised by knowledge, empathy, and preparedness concerning cancer was highlighted. They are instrumental in facilitating open discussions and providing support to students and families affected by the disease.

- **Call to Action for the CBSE**

A specific recommendation was directed towards the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to consider the introduction of a curriculum focused on lifestyle diseases and the promotion of healthy habits among students. This proactive measure could significantly contribute to long-term health and well-being.

The webinar effectively underscored the need to integrate cancer awareness into school mental health programs. By equipping students and educators with knowledge, fostering empathy, and encouraging open dialogue, schools can play a significant role in destigmatising cancer and creating supportive environments for those affected. The implementation of modules like the *Sashakt Cancer Life Skill Module* and the promotion of healthy lifestyles are crucial steps in this direction. The call to action for educational bodies like the CBSE highlights the potential for systemic change in promoting health awareness among the younger generation.

