Cancer and Indian films

Sir,
Cancer afflicts all communities worldwide. Approximately 10 million people are diagnosed with cancer and more than six million die of the disease every year.[1] Today cancer is the second leading cause of death.[2]

In India, it is estimated that there are approximately 2-2.5 million cases of cancer at any given point of time with around seven lakh new cases being detected each year. Nearly half of these cases die each year.[2] Due to the rising incidence of cancer, especially oral cancer and lung cancer, the Government of India has banned tobacco smoking, on screen, in films. This step taken by government must be appreciated by all sectors of society.

Indian films are presumed to be one of the major causes of the smoking habit in young adults. Indian films, especially Hindi language films of every genre, have cancer patients as central characters. The films seem to tackle the issue of cancer. The film “Anand,” directed by late Hrishikesh Mukherjee, is one of the most memorable films about a cancer patient. “Lymphosarcoma of intestine” became a household name due the film. The film tackles an emotional and inspiring journey towards death of a last stage cancer patient known as Anand played by Rajesh Khanna. Another film “Safar,” is based on the life of a painter suffering from cancer. The film “Mili,” directed by late Hrishikesh Mukherjee, is a touching film of a lively young girl diagnosed as suffering from cancer. “Dard Ka Rishta,” directed by late Sunil Dutt, is a brilliant film tackling an issue of cancer in children. A recent film entitled as “Kal Ho Na Ho,” directed by Nikhil Advani, is the story of modern day “Anand” - a young man with cancer, who knows that he is going to die, lives his life to the fullest. The Marathi language film “Shwaas” is the emotional journey of a child with cancer, of both eyes, and his grandfather; the path from light to darkness in the child’s life. “Shwaas” is based on a real life story and was also sent as an official entry to Oscars from India.

All these films are not really scientifically correct. They make some contribution regarding cancer awareness but little in cancer education, which is an important area of primary prevention of the cancer. These films are noteworthy as they show another human side of the Indian Film Industry and social commitment of Indian Films.

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