LOOK AT THE person next to you. It is shocking to think that, according to the latest figures from Cancer Research UK, one of the two of you will develop cancer at some point during your lifetime. What’s even more frightening is that this statistic is set to worsen. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that global cancer cases will soar to a staggering 70 per cent over the next two decades, from 14 million in 2012 to 22 million new cases a year in 2032.

With old age being the single greatest risk factor for developing cancer, the global ageing population is unequivocally a key player in this rise in incidence. Region-specific trends are also a significant contributor. In developing countries, growing prevalence in lung, breast and colorectal cancer is associated with the transition toward ‘wealthier’ lifestyle behaviours, such as increased tobacco and alcohol consumption and higher calorie intake.

However, this rise in prevalence is not to be mistaken for a lack of progress in the cancer research field – quite the contrary. The past four decades have seen critical treatment breakthroughs for numerous forms of the disease, which have led to vastly improved prognoses. The five-year survival rate for childhood acute lymphoblastic leukaemia has dramatically increased from less than 10 per cent in the 1960s to around 90 per cent today. Mortality due to breast cancer has dropped by one-third since the 1980s. And an individual diagnosed with colon cancer in the 1970s might typically have lived for just seven months, whereas they are now more likely to live beyond a decade.

Nonetheless, the growing number of cancer incidences cannot go unnoticed, and the quest to ‘cure’ cancer must go hand in hand with equally important strategies for prevention, detection and palliative care to alleviate the inevitable strain on healthcare systems and, ultimately, ‘control’ the disease. From novel imaging techniques and the potential of aspirin, to the budding field of cancer immunotherapy, this issue of International Innovation brings together research spanning the full spectrum of cancer control. These projects are complemented by high-level contributions from WHO Cancer Control Programme, International Cancer Genome Consortium, Association of European Cancer Leagues and Cancer Research Technology, all of which are united in recognising the need for comprehensive frameworks and multidisciplinary collaborations across research, industry and policy.

At International Innovation, we showcase the latest and greatest in scientific developments from across the research and policy landscape. Feel free to register to receive our newsletter (see p14) or visit www.internationalinnovation.com to browse our most recent editions.

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