National cancer screening program in Korea

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Cancer has been a leading cause of death in Korea since 1983. Due to a rapid change in age structure, the burden of cancer is expected to be a greater issue in the near future. The Korean government established a 10-year National Cancer Control Plan in 1996 and the 2nd term of the NCCP program in 2006. For primary prevention activities, Korea is enforcing several anti-cancer activities such as ‘Cancer Prevention Day’ for public awareness, ‘Ten Codes and Practical Guidelines’ for cancer risk reduction, ‘National Cancer Information Center’ for standardized information on cancer prevention, developing policies and programs for Tobacco Control, and strategic planning for cancer prevention caused by infection, i.e., National HBV Vaccination Program. The Korean Government has started the National Cancer Screening Program (NCSP) in 1999. The NCSP now supports cancer screening for five major sites of cancer (stomach, breast, cervix, liver, colorectal cancer) to the Medical Aids and the National Health Insurance (NHI) beneficiaries to the lower 50% income group. The NCSP covers about 56% of the total population. In 2010, the target population of the NCSP was more than 8.4 million persons, and about 3.3 million people participated in the cancer screening program. The overall participation rate in the NCSP has gradually improved to 35.7% in 2010. For the remaining upper 50% NHI beneficiaries, cancer screening has been provided by the NHI cancer screening program according to the same recommendations as the NCSP since 2001. Individuals pay 10% and the remaining 90% for screening is supported by the NHI Corporation.

From the results of the Korea National Cancer Screening Survey 2004-2011, the cancer screening rates following recommendations was increased from 38.8% in 2004 to 56.1% in 2011. Based on the concerted efforts of primary prevention to reduce the cancer burden, there has been a significant reduction in both stomach cancer and liver cancer mortality, and tremendous increase in cancer survival rates for select cancers in Korea.