

## 2. Identifying pre cancerous lesions the way forward in cancer prevention

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Premalignant (precancerous) lesions are morphologically abnormal tissue which appears atypical under microscopic examination. These lesions are not overtly malignant, but have an increased risk of transforming into a cancer than its apparently normal counterpart. Precancerous lesions can be found almost anywhere in the body and that early detection is one of the most important aspects of curing cancer. Most precancerous lesions are detected in people over 40 years of age. It is difficult to predict which precancerous lesions will transform and how long it will take.

Some of the well recognized precancerous lesions include cervical intraepithelial neoplasia, adenomatous polyps of the colon, oral leukoplakia, insitu carcinoma of breast, Barrett's disease, chronic atrophic gastritis, ulcerative colitis, actinic keratosis.

The risk factors of precancerous lesions are same as for its cancerous counterpart. Precancerous cells have a rapid, uncoordinated growth and precede the development of invasive cancer. Precancerous lesions may be asymptomatic or associated with physical changes. Asymptomatic lesions such as cervical intraepithelial neoplasia, insitu carcinoma of breast and adenomatous polyps of the colon are detected by medical screening tests such as the pap test, mammogram and colonoscopic procedures respectively. Symptomatic lesions are biopsied when there is a concern about cancer.

Treatment can range from simply watching the patient closely, having minor surgery, starting a medication that helps prevent growth, or possibly a major surgery. In some cases, it may even be a sign that family members need to be checked or followed as well.

When a patient has precancerous cells, they are an indicator that the patient should be monitored carefully in the future. Consistent screening and monitoring will help a doctor identify cancer early, if it shows up, allowing for prompt provision of treatment. Precancerous lesions can also indicate the need for prophylactic treatment to prevent the appearance of cancer.

Key words: premalignant lesions, pre-invasive carcinoma