

PRESS RELEASE

Biocon Foundation and IISc Commemorate World Head & Neck Cancer Day

- 6th edition of Oral Cancer Task Force Annual Meeting Held at IISc
- Synopsis of White Paper on Oral Cancer Elimination in India and
- Annual Consensus Guidelines Update Released

Bengaluru, INDIA, Monday, July 28, 2025:

Biocon Foundation, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of the **Biocon Group**, in association with the **Indian Institute of Science (IISc)**, commemorated **World Head & Neck Cancer Day** with 6th edition of **Oral Cancer Task Force (OCTF)** Annual Meeting on July 25-26, 2025 at the IISc campus. The two-day event focused on the theme of '**Ideate, Innovate, and Implement**' and released the synopsis of a white paper on oral cancer elimination in India.

OCTF is an independent multi-disciplinary task force comprising leading specialists. In 2018, Biocon Foundation had taken the initiative to form the OCTF with a mission to ideate, educate and engage stakeholders and thereby, effectively downstage oral cancer in India.

This year, the OCTF focused on preparing a white paper on **Oral Cancer Elimination in India** and updating its **annual consensus guidelines**. This white paper, developed with expert inputs from across the globe, aims to inform and influence policy decisions in a meaningful way.

Dr Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairperson, Biocon Group said, *"Our deepened partnership with IISc marks a powerful convergence of scientific excellence and social commitment. With IISc leading the next phase of OCTF, we are creating an innovation ecosystem focused on AI-led diagnostics, bioinformatics, and accessible technologies tailored to India and other LMICs."*

Dr Anupama Shetty, Mission Director, Biocon Foundation, said, *"For over a decade, Biocon Foundation has driven an innovation- and research-led oral cancer surveillance program. Through strategic collaborations and under the aegis of the Oral Cancer Task Force, we have built a robust evidence base for early detection and prevention. The transition of OCTF to a Secretariat led by the Indian Institute of Science will harness IISc's scientific depth and technical capabilities to scale this mission with greater precision and impact. OCTF's framework for oral cancer elimination is a clarion call to action—adding urgency and momentum to our collective efforts."*

From this year onwards the **IISc will serve as the secretariat for OCTF**, leading the initiative to reduce late-stage oral cancer diagnoses. This collaborative effort aims to leverage advanced technologies to lower the overall burden of oral cancer in India. A smart phone-based AI-enabled oral cancer screening tool has been developed recently with support from

the **Ministry of Education, Kotak IISc AI-ML Centre, Centre for Networked Intelligence, and The AI Collective partners.**

Prof Rajesh Sundaresan, Dean, Division of EECS, IISc, said, “*Screening can help detect suspicious oral lesions early. IISc, in collaboration with clinical, technical, and government partners, is working to develop and implement such tools in line with the OCTF white paper.*”

In addition to the release of the updated consensus guidelines, the event featured a strategic session led by the **Task Force and AI Collective partners** aimed at developing a national strategic framework for the elimination of oral cancer – an initiative aligned with another global effort aimed at eliminating cervical cancer. **The event concluded with the release of a synopsis of the forthcoming White Paper on oral cancer elimination in India.**

Consensus Guidelines - Indian Clinical Practice Consensus Guidelines for Head & Neck Cancer – Update 2025

Under the aegis of OCTF, the first Indian Clinical Practice Guidelines on Management of Head & Neck Cancer (HNC) were laid down and published in the **Indian Journal of Cancer** in February 2020. It has been recognized amongst the 13 worldwide clinical practice guidelines by **Cancers**, an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal of oncology. The guidelines are updated annually to provide the evidence-based recommendations for treating head and neck cancer in India benchmarking continued improvisation in treatment and survival outcomes.

The **Indian Clinical Practice Consensus Guidelines for Head & Neck Cancer – Update 2025**, was presented by **Dr Kumar Prabhash**, Medical Oncologist, Tata Memorial Hospital. These guidelines are being published in the *Journal of Cancer Research Statistics and Treatment* as informed by **Dr Neera Gupta** - General Manager – Medical Affairs and Clinical Development, Eris Lifesciences Ltd.

The event had a global outlook, drawing participation from a diverse group of experts across key domains including Head and Neck Oncology, Community Oncology, Oral Medicine, Artificial Intelligence, Public Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society. Eminent speakers from leading institutions such as the **National Cancer Institute, NIH (USA), Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC), Tata Memorial Centre, ACTREC, and AIIMS**, among others, contributed to the discussions.

The event brought together clinicians and scientists to discuss progress in oral cancer screening for early detection. Experts such as **Dr GK Rath**, Member, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, **Dr Moni Abraham Kuriakose**, Co-Founder, MD & CEO, Karkinos Healthcare; **Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi**, Tata Memorial Centre, **Dr Vijay Chandru**, Strand Life Sciences; **Dr Praveen Birur**, Vice Principal - KLESIDS & Lead - Oral Cancer Program, Biocon Foundation; faculty members **Prof Rajesh Sundaresan, Prof Phaneendra Yalavarthy, Prof Prabhdeep Kaur and Prof**

Debnath Pal from IISc, and **Dr Anupama Shetty**, Mission Director, Biocon Foundation, among others, graced the event. **Dr Kumar Prabhash**, Medical Oncologist, Tata Memorial Hospital, attended the event virtually.

Dr GK Rath, Member, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board said, *"Globally, cancer claimed 9 million lives in 2020, with oral cancer ranking sixth. India accounts for one-third of global oral cancer cases, with an incidence rate of 10.2% and mortality rate of 8.7%. According to 2022 data, oral cancer is the leading cancer site among men with 107,812 cases, while among women, it ranks fourth with 35,947 cases. Oral cancer is usually preceded by early oral lesions called oral potentially malignant disorders (OPMDs). Screening regularly can aid in early detection that can down size oral cancer, significantly reduce mortality rates and improve overall survival rates. Hence oral cancer screenings are crucial to reduce disease burden in high-risk populations."*

Dr Moni Abraham Kuriakose, Co-Founder, MD & CEO, Karkinos Healthcare said, *"Oral Cancer Task Force will be releasing a white paper on Oral Cancer Elimination in India. The three-prong strategy for cancer elimination needs to be emphasized - primary prevention, early detection, distributed care coordination. This also aligns with WHO strategy."*

Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, Tata Memorial Centre said, *"Tobacco is a primary cause of oral cancer. Effective cessation strategies include brief counselling, therapy, and digital tools like text messaging and smartphone apps to help users quit. Government initiatives such as the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), and National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) support tobacco control efforts, reducing tobacco use and associated health risks like oral cancer."*

Prof Phaneendra Yalavarthy, who leads an AI Centre of Excellence in Healthcare at IISc, said, *"Our field experience shows that technology enables scaling of screening and empowers low-skilled frontline health workers to play a more active role. An AI algorithm that can provide interpretations of images in under a second using a mobile phone has been achieved to provide accelerated feedback."*

Prof Prabhdeep Kaur, Chair of the Isaac Centre for Public Health, IISc, added, *"The rapid feedback at the point-of-care location allows the health worker to immediately counsel individuals and refer them to appropriate care, thus reducing delays and minimizing loss to follow-up."*

Prof Debnath Pal from IISc, who leads MIDAS, an effort to collect, manage, and facilitate the use of medical imaging data from across the country, said, *"The imaging dataset along with gold-standard annotations in a multimodal framework will boost grassroots AI innovation, paving the way for large-scale screening, early detection, and better treatment outcomes."*

Dr Praveen Birur, Vice Principal of KLE, added, *“Screening is one of the ways to combat the high disease burden. We also need a multi-pronged strategy, including disease and habit awareness.”*

About Oral Cancer Task Force

The Oral Cancer Task Force (OCTF) was launched in 2018 by a group of academicians, government bodies, private organizations, and research institutions. With financial support from Biocon Foundation, the initiative focuses on the early detection and management of oral potentially malignant disorders (OPMDs), as well as developing standard guidelines for treating head and neck cancers.

Even prior to the formal establishment of the OCTF, its members had been actively contributing to various impactful initiatives over the last 15 years, including digital tools for early detection and publishing consensus guidelines on OPMDs and head and neck cancers.

For more details, visit: <https://oralcancertaskforce.org/>

About Biocon Foundation:

Biocon Foundation, the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of Biocon, Biocon Biologics and Syngene International, has been working to empower marginalized communities since 2005. Biocon Foundation partners with the society to promote social and economic inclusion. It has thus made significant investments in enhancing access to quality healthcare, education, and civic infrastructure along with environmental sustainability projects. Combined with field initiatives, these programs create a momentum to elevate the marginalized sections of the society. Over the years, Biocon Foundation has built a strong reputation for the quality of its programs and their impact in addressing the social, humanitarian, and environmental challenges facing India. To make a more meaningful impact, the Foundation regularly partners with government agencies and like-minded organizations for program delivery. Besides addressing critical national and state level challenges in primary healthcare, education and rural development, the Foundation is also augmenting environmental sustainability through the lake revival mission in Bengaluru. Visit: <http://www.bioconfoundation.org>

About IISc:

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) was established in 1909 by a visionary partnership between the industrialist Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the Mysore royal family and the Government of India. Over the last 116 years, IISc has become India’s premier institute for advanced scientific and technological research and education. Its mandate is “to provide for advanced instruction and to conduct original investigations in all branches of knowledge as are likely to promote the material and industrial welfare of India.” In 2018, IISc was selected as an Institution of

Eminence (IoE) by the Government of India, and it consistently figures among the top Indian institutions in world university rankings.

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