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Crew Health Advice: The Impact of Cancer on Seafarers

Date

4 February 2025

World Cancer Day 2025: The Impact of Cancer on Seafarers

World Cancer Day, observed on 4 February 2025, is a global initiative led by the World Health Organization (WHO) to raise awareness about cancer and encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment [\[1\]](#)

[\[https://www.worldcancerday.org/\]](https://www.worldcancerday.org/). Cancer can be a unique challenge faced by seafarers; a group often overlooked in health discussions.

The Global Cancer Burden

According to WHO (World Health Organisation), in 2022, there were an estimated twenty million new cancer cases and 9.7 million deaths. About 1 in 5 people develop cancer in their lifetime, approximately 1 in 9 men and 1 in 12 women die from the disease. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide, accounting for the highest mortality rates among both men and women. Globally, the most common cancers are breast, lung, colon and rectum, and prostate cancer [\[2\] \[https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch\]](https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch).

The cancer burden continues to grow globally, exerting tremendous physical, emotional, and financial strain on individuals, families, communities and health systems. Many health systems in low and middle-income countries are least prepared to manage this burden, and large numbers of cancer patients globally do not have access to timely quality diagnosis and treatment. In countries where health systems are strong, survival rates of many types of cancers are improving thanks to accessible early detection, quality treatment and survivorship care [2] [\[https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch\]](https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch).

The American Cancer Society reports that while cancer deaths are declining overall, the burden is shifting towards younger adults and women. This trend underscores the need for targeted interventions and support systems for all demographics, including seafarers [3] [\[https://www.uicc.org/news-and-updates/events/world-cancer-day-2025\]](https://www.uicc.org/news-and-updates/events/world-cancer-day-2025).

Cancer and Seafarers: A Unique Challenge

Seafarers face unique health risks due to their prolonged exposure to harsh environmental conditions, such as saltwater, sun, and extreme weather. These factors can lead to skin issues, including dermatitis, fungal infections, and even skin cancer. The isolated and demanding nature of their work also means that seafarers often have limited access to healthcare services, making early detection and treatment of cancer more challenging [4] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/).

A case study by the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) highlights the financial and emotional toll cancer can take on seafarers and their families. One seafarer, John, faced the unimaginable challenge of having both his son and wife diagnosed with cancer in the same year. The Seafarers Emergency Fund provided crucial financial support, allowing John to focus on his work while ensuring his family received the necessary treatment [5] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/seafarers-emergency-fund-eligibility-form/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/seafarers-emergency-fund-eligibility-form/).

Industry Guidance and Support

Organisations like the Seafarers' Emergency Fund, managed by International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) play a vital role in supporting seafarers affected by cancer. These organisations provide financial assistance, emotional support, and access to healthcare services [6] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/). Additionally, the maritime industry is increasingly recognising the importance of health and wellbeing programs for seafarers. Initiatives aimed at improving mental health, promoting healthy lifestyles, and providing regular health screenings are essential in mitigating the impact of cancer on this vulnerable group [7] [\[https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services\]](https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services)

Conclusion

As we observe World Cancer Day 2025, it is crucial to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by seafarers in the fight against cancer. By raising awareness and providing targeted support, we can help ensure that seafarers receive the care and assistance they need. Let us continue to advocate for better health services and support systems for all, regardless of their occupation or location.

[1] [\[https://www.worldcancerday.org/\]](https://www.worldcancerday.org/) : World Cancer Day 2025
[2] [\[https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch\]](https://www.worldcancerday.org/activities/world-cancer-day-2025-official-campaign-launch) : Global cancer burden growing, amidst mounting need for services [\[https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services\]](https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services)
[3] [\[https://www.uicc.org/news-and-updates/events/world-cancer-day-2025\]](https://www.uicc.org/news-and-updates/events/world-cancer-day-2025) : 2024 Cancer Facts & Figures Cancer - American Cancer Society
[\[https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/facts-and-figures-2024.html\]](https://www.cancer.org/research/acs-research-news/facts-and-figures-2024.html) [4] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/) : A healthy crew, a happy ship: Physical wellness matters for life onboard [\[https://safety4sea.com/cm-a-healthy-crew-a-happy-ship-physical-wellness-matters-for-life-onboard/\]](https://safety4sea.com/cm-a-healthy-crew-a-happy-ship-physical-wellness-matters-for-life-onboard/) [5] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/seafarers-emergency-fund-eligibility-form/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/seafarers-emergency-fund/seafarers-emergency-fund-eligibility-form/) : Case Study in Seafarer Aid: Support for a Family Fighting Cancer [\[https://maritime-executive.com/editorials/case-study-in-seafarer-aid-support-for-a-family-fighting-cancer\]](https://maritime-executive.com/editorials/case-study-in-seafarer-aid-support-for-a-family-fighting-cancer) [6] [\[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/) : Seafarers' Emergency Fund (SEF) - International Seafarers' Welfare & Assistance Network

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[\[https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services\]](https://www.who.int/news/item/01-02-2024-global-cancer-burden-growing--amidst-mounting-need-for-services) : [The Top Maritime Welfare Organizations for Crew Members \[https://www.shipuniverse.com/the-top-maritime-welfare-organizations-for-crew-members/\]](https://www.shipuniverse.com/the-top-maritime-welfare-organizations-for-crew-members/)

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- [6] [Relief funds - International Seafarers' Welfare & Assistance Network \[https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/\]](https://www.iswan.org.uk/relief-funds/)
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