Nearly Half of Cancer Survivors Died From Conditions Other Than Cancer

AACR

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- Fifty-one percent of people who have had cancer died from cancer.
- Forty-nine percent of cancer survivors died from other conditions.
- Researchers encourage a more comprehensive approach to survivor health.

CHICAGO — Although cancer recurrence may be the overriding fear for many survivors, nearly half of survivors from a recently presented study died from other conditions.

These results indicate survivors could potentially benefit from a more comprehensive, less cancer-focused approach to their health, according to lead researcher Yi Ning, M.D., Sc.D., assistant professor in the department of epidemiology and community health at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and associate research member at VCU Massey Cancer Center in Richmond, Va. Ning presented the results at the AACR Annual Meeting 2012, held here March 31-April 4.

“We realized that the mortality rates for some types of cancer, such as breast cancer, had declined,” said Ning. “Cancer survivors live much longer than they did several decades ago. So with this large group of cancer survivors, we need to pay more attention to cancer survivors’ overall health.”

Ning and colleagues evaluated 1,807 cancer survivors who had participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) study. The most common forms of cancer among the study group were breast, prostate, cervical, lung and colorectal.

When originally surveyed through NHANES, a large percentage of the study group suffered from conditions other than cancer, including cardiovascular conditions, hypertension and diabetes.

Researchers followed patients for more than 18 years. During the course of the study, 776 cancer survivors died. Fifty-one percent died from cancer and 49 percent died from other causes. Cardiovascular disease was the primary cause of noncancer deaths.

Researchers found that the longer patients survived after their initial cancer diagnosis, the more likely they were to die from another disease: 32.8 percent died from another condition within five years of diagnosis compared with 62.7 percent after 20 years.

With nearly half of cancer survivors dying from other causes, Ning said that physicians and patients must improve efforts to manage those risks.

“After the detection of cancer, clinicians and cancer survivors pay less attention to the prevention and treatment of other diseases and complications,” said Ning. “We shouldn’t neglect other aspects of health because we are focused on cancer and overlook other chronic conditions.”

Press registration for the AACR Annual Meeting 2012 is free to qualified journalists and public information officers: www.aacr.org/PressRegistration [2].

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About the AACR

Founded in 1907, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) is the world’s first and largest professional organization dedicated to advancing cancer research and its mission to prevent and cure cancer. AACR’s membership includes 34,000 laboratory, translational and clinical researchers; population scientists; other health care professionals; and cancer advocates residing in more than 90 countries. The AACR marshals the full spectrum of expertise of the cancer community to accelerate progress in the prevention, biology, diagnosis and treatment of cancer by annually convening more than 20 conferences and educational workshops, the largest of which is the AACR Annual Meeting with more than 18,000 attendees. In addition, the AACR publishes seven peer-reviewed scientific journals and a magazine for cancer survivors, patients and their caregivers. The AACR funds meritorious research directly as well as in cooperation with numerous cancer organizations. As the Scientific Partner of Stand Up To Cancer, the AACR provides expert peer review, grants administration and scientific oversight of individual and team science grants in cancer research that have the potential for patient benefit. The AACR actively communicates with legislators and policymakers about the value of cancer research and related biomedical science in saving lives from cancer.

For more information about the AACR, visit www.AACR.org [6].

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