

Cancer survivors face other battles

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.diseases.cancer/2004-09/0018.html>

From: Roman Bystrianyk (rbystrianyk_at_gmail.com)

Date: 09/01/04

Date: 31 Aug 2004 17:49:18 -0700

http://www.healthsentinel.com/news.php?event=news_print_list_item&id=185

Liz Szabo, "Cancer survivors face other battles", USA Today, August 31, 2004,

Link: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2004-08-31-cancer-survivors_x.htm

A new study finds that cancer casts a long shadow on the lives of survivors, harming their ability to work and perform daily chores more than a decade after diagnosis.

Compared with people without the disease, cancer survivors feel sicker, miss work more often, are more likely to be disabled and bedridden and are less likely to be employed, according to a study in today's Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

In a survey of more than 1,800 cancer survivors and nearly 5,500 people never diagnosed with the disease, 31% of survivors described their health as fair or poor, compared with 18% of other people. Cancer survivors more often suffered from a litany of ills, including arthritis, back or neck problems, fractures, high blood pressure and breathing problems.

The study's lead author, Robin Yabroff of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), says she was surprised that problems lingered so long, even when cancer survivors were compared with people of the same age, sex and educational level. The study was based on the 2000 National Health Interview Survey, conducted annually by the National Center for Health Statistics.

Yabroff says the survey does not reveal whether survivors' problems stemmed from disabilities caused by the initial cancer, returning tumors or the toxic side effects of treatment.

Despite the problems, cancer survivors were no more likely to be depressed or to suffer from strokes, heart problems, diabetes or weight problems.

David Johnson, president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma about 15 years ago. He says he still suffers from pain in his joints and neck and has developed hypertension and breathing problems.

Earlier research has shown that survivors often struggle with a variety of serious problems, many stemming from treatment. Chemotherapy can damage the heart, hormone treatments can cause impotence, and radiation sometimes leads to secondary cancers. Women who undergo radical mastectomies often suffer from a painful swelling of the arms for which there is no effective treatment.

Johnson acknowledges that today's article paints a somewhat bleak picture of survivors. But, he notes, "you have to be alive to have these problems."

In fact, about 64% of cancer patients now survive at least five years, according to the NCI.

And half of people with cancer live as long as those without the disease, says Harmon Eyre, chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society, which is preparing its own study of 25,000 cancer survivors.

Today's article is the latest in a series of reports published in the past six months that focuses on the needs of the nation's nearly 10 million cancer survivors, a growing field of research. The article underscores the need to find cancer earlier, Eyre says. In many cases, early-stage disease is more easily cured and causes less long-term damage.

"Our goal is to have these people have the highest quality of life available," Eyre says. "And to do that, we need to learn about them."