

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Cancer Cell Types Vary in Lethality”

Cancer remains the leading cause of death in the United States. The National Cancer Institute estimates that doctors will diagnose 1,735,350 new cases across the US in 2018 and that 609,640 people will die from cancer in this year. To understand the difference in outlook between cancer types, researchers often use a statistic called the 5-year survival rate. This figure refers to the percentage of people who survive for 5 years after the diagnosis of cancer. Detecting and treating the disease at an early stage can significantly improve a person's outlook. The 5-year survival rate does not indicate whether or not treatment has removed all signs of cancer, but it is useful for comparing the relative severity of different types of cancer. It is important to remember that many other factors influence survival, such as how early the cancer was detected. The cancers with the highest 5-year relative survival rates include melanoma, Hodgkin lymphoma, breast, prostate, testicular, cervical, and thyroid cancer. Even though cancer survival rates have improved to record levels, the over-all incidence of cancer has continued to rise. Medical experts are now saying, "More than half of all people born in 1960 will develop cancer at some point in their lives." The increase in lifetime risk is believed to be primarily because more people are surviving into old age, where cancer is more common. We need to be aware that there are believed to be many ways to help prevent cancer. Smoking, inactivity, consumption of alcohol, diets high in red meat, diets low in vegetables and fruits, and consumption of processed meats are thought to increase one's chances of developing cancer. Many factors influence the likelihood of successful cancer treatment, including the type of cancer. To provide a more accurate estimate of the outlook for cancer, doctors can also refer to 5-year relative survival rates. The 5-year relative survival rate for stage 0 and 1 breast cancer is 99%-100%. Thyroid cancer has a 5-year relative survival rate of 98%-100% at stages 1 and 2. Most thyroid cancers grow slowly. Melanoma has a 5-year relative survival rate of around 92%-97% at stages 1A and 1B, respectively. It has a high survival rate because it is easy to detect in this part of the body. Cervical cancer has a 93% 5-year relative survival rate at stages 0 and 1A. Early detection is key. Hodgkin lymphoma has a 5-year relative survival rate of around 90% at stages 1 and 2, due to it responding well to radiation treatment. However, other types of lymphoma do not respond as well to treatment.

In the America that I love, early detection and treatment of cancer can significantly improve the chances of achieving remission.

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