



live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and health care specialists at Bouchard Insurance.

Cancer: Learning the Facts

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), about 562,000 Americans die of cancer each year. It is the second most common cause of death in the U.S., only after heart disease.

Definition and Causes

Cancer is a term for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade other tissues. Cancer cells spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems. The disease can be caused by both outside elements such as tobacco, chemicals, radiation and infectious organisms; and internal elements, like inherited gene mutations, metabolic mutations and immune conditions.

Types

There are more than 100 variations of cancer. Some of the most common include:

- *Carcinoma* – begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs
- *Sarcoma* – begins in bone, cartilage, fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other connective or supportive tissue
- *Leukemia* – starts in blood-forming tissue such as the bone marrow, and causes large numbers of abnormal blood cells to be produced and enter the blood
- *Lymphoma/myeloma* – cancers that begin in the cells of the immune system
- *Central nervous system cancers* – begin in the tissues of the brain and spinal cord

Cancer Stages

Staging describes the extent or severity of an individual's cancer based on the original tumor and the extent of spreading throughout the body. Staging is important for three reasons: it helps with a physician's treatment, it can be used to estimate the patient's prognosis and it is helpful for determining patient eligibility for clinical trials. The staging process is complicated, but in general, cancer is classified from stages I (early onset) to IV (advanced).

Treatment

Depending on the type of cancer, there are a variety of treatments, including chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, biological therapy, hormone therapy and targeted therapy. According to the ACS, the 5-year survival rate after cancer was 66 percent between 1996 and 2003; this is up from 50 percent in the late 1970s. An estimated 11.1 million people with a previous diagnosis of cancer are living today.

Coping Techniques

A diagnosis of cancer can result in depression, confusion and panic, along with the disease-related difficulties of fatigue, pain and medical costs. It is important for

affected individuals to be surrounded by compassionate family and friends. Support groups can also be a great source of comfort.

Prevention

Any cancer caused by smoking or drinking alcohol can be prevented entirely. The ACS estimates that around 169,000 yearly cancer deaths are tobacco-related. In addition, about one third of all cancer deaths each year are related to obesity, a sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition. Skin cancer can also be avoided by using sunscreen or staying out of the sun entirely. Regular preventive cancer screenings are an important part of an individual's medical routine.



Did You Know...?

Anyone can develop cancer, but the risk increases with age, and may be greater than you think. In the U.S., approximately one in two males and one in three females will develop cancer sometime in their lives.