



Wyoming Cancer Survivorship



Introduction

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Wyoming and in the United States. Although the federal government's "War on Cancer," declared in 1971, has proven to be an intractable battle, statisticians continue to report the number of people diagnosed as having cancer who then survive is increasing. In 2009, it is estimated that 2,500 Wyoming men and women will be diagnosed with cancer, and approximately 1,000 will die of the disease. Due to advances in the early detection and treatment of cancer, people are living many years after a diagnosis. In 2006, about 11.4 million people with a previous diagnosis of cancer were living in the United States. Wyoming has approximately 26,719 cancer survivors and that number continues to increase. It is clear that cancer survivorship is an area of importance in Wyoming.

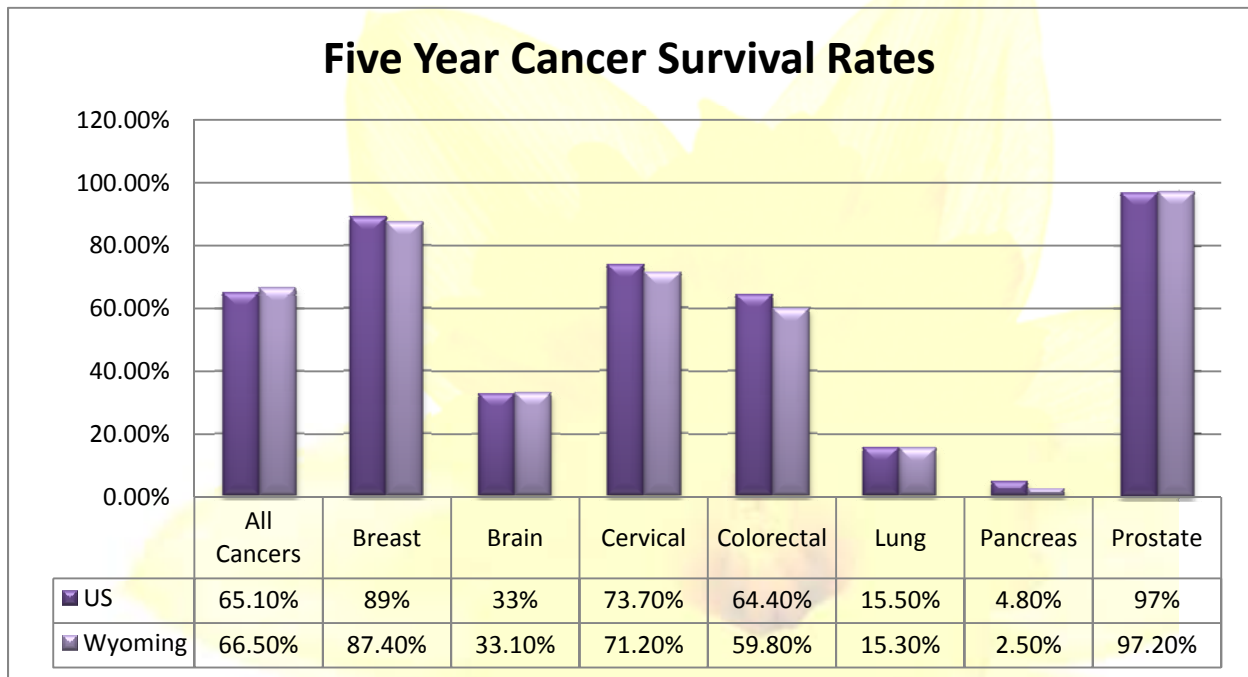
Who Is A Cancer Survivor?

The term "cancer survivor" refers to a person who has been diagnosed with cancer and the people in their lives who are affected by the diagnosis, including family members, friends, and caregivers. The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS) defined cancer survivorship as the experience of living with, through, or beyond cancer. It is an ongoing process that begins at the moment of diagnosis and continues for the remainder of life; composed of stages or phases of survival. The Lance Armstrong Foundation went further by expanding on the three stages of living "with," "through," and "beyond" cancer. Living "with" cancer is the experience of receiving a cancer diagnosis and any treatment that may follow. Living "through" cancer refers to the extended state following treatment, which includes the time when the person has completed treatment and/or is in remission. Living "beyond" cancer is the post-treatment and long-term survivorship stage, including the time when the activity of the disease or likelihood of its return is sufficiently small that the cancer can now be considered permanently arrested. Later the NCCS leaders further expanded the definition of, "cancer survivor" to embrace individuals from the time of their initial diagnosis through the balance of their lives, and in later decades, to cancer patient family members, friends and caregivers. Anyone who has been affected by cancer is a cancer survivor. Cancer affects everyone in one way or another. No matter how it looks, most people are cancer survivors.

What Is A Cancer Survival Rate?

Cancer survival rate is the percentage of people who survive a certain type of cancer for a specific amount of time. Cancer epidemiologists often use an overall five-year survival rate as a goal for survivors. An overall survival rate includes people of all ages and health conditions diagnosed with a specific cancer, including those diagnosed very early and those diagnosed very late. The cancer five year survival rate describes the percentage of patients who are alive five years after cancer is diagnosed.

Typically after being cancer free for five years the cancer is considered cured. This five year rate should not to be confused with being considered a cancer survivor.



Cancer Survivorship Issues

When addressing cancer survivorship issues, the majority of issues can be identified in four general areas: physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being.

Physical

Cancer survivors not only cope with the physical symptoms of cancer itself, but with the effects of treatment. Such symptoms may occur as chronic or acute physical problems during and after treatment such as pain, fatigue, hair loss, weight loss, appetite change, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, and mental confusion urologic, gastrointestinal, sexual/reproductive, and musculoskeletal effects. Certain cancer treatments can cause sterility, impotence, testicular atrophy, premature menopause, and other changes that can affect an individual's ability to reproduce. Cancer pain is also a significant problem for many survivors.

Psychological

The moment an individual is diagnosed with cancer, they may begin to experience a wide range of feelings. These feelings can include anger, fear, shock, anxiety, stress, as well as hopefulness and optimism. It is recognized that such feelings can be debilitating and even lead to other health conditions, such as clinical depression. Many patients are still reluctant to communicate their feelings to their physicians or even family members. Mental health and counseling services are commonly not covered by insurance, which adds a barrier to receiving the quality cancer care a survivor receives. Mental health and counseling services can help the cancer

survivor, as well as family and friends, to understand the physical and emotional changes they are experiencing, ultimately alleviating anxiety and stress associated with these changes.

Social

Being diagnosed with cancer poses many challenges when trying to carry on with employment or normal daily activities. Childhood cancer survivors can find it difficult to return to school, as they feel left out and left behind. Many survivors find themselves dependent on others because of the limitations imposed by cancer and the effects of its treatment. The life they once knew is interrupted to the extent that their sense of social well-being or self-worth is diminished. This is an area in which psychosocial support services can help cancer patients adjust to their new roles in the family and workplace, and assist in the re-establishment of autonomy.

Economic

The cost of cancer treatment is a major area of concern for cancer survivors. The financial burden of the disease can worsen because some cancer patients lose their jobs or are forced into early retirement due to the effects of treatment. Those who try to find new employment are often met with discriminatory results. Even if cancer survivors are able to keep their jobs, they may still face challenges when reentering the workforce. Despite this issue, a cancer survivor may decide not to change jobs for fear of losing health insurance or being unable to find other employment. Even if cancer patients are able to retain their job and health insurance, out-of-pocket expenses can be a devastating financial burden. High deductibles and co-payments, transportation, child and elder care, home care expenses, and special foods or equipment can be extremely costly. Another area of high cost are services that cancer patients may need, but are not considered part of their treatment. For instance, mental health services, fertility treatment, and physical or occupational therapy may or may not be covered by health insurance. These needed and necessary treatments may add to the already heavy financial burden.

Cancer Survivorship Policy

There are three times more cancer survivors alive today than 30 years ago. Due to remarkable advances in the detection of and treatment of cancer, people are now surviving longer after cancer diagnosis and treatment. Cancer is less of a death sentence than it was in the past. These advances have also played a key role in allowing those with cancer to lead full lives during and after treatment. Policymakers who are aware of these cancer survivorship issues are better

*And it moves us all
Through despair and hope
Through faith and love
Till we find our place
On the path unwinding
In the Circle
The Circle of Life
– The Lion King, lyrics Tim Rice,
music Elton John*

able to make informed policy decisions. The following are examples of key policy issues the National Conference of State Legislatures has determined important for cancer survivors.

Comprehensive Cancer Control Plans - Cancer control plans provide roadmaps for states to address cancer control, including survivorship issues. As of July 2009, all 50 states have created a cancer control plan. Currently, Wyoming is working on implementing the 2006-2010 Wyoming Cancer Control Plan and is working on revising the plan for 2011-2015. The Centers for Disease and Control support state efforts not only with funding, but by offering a variety of resources and assistance.

Health Insurance - Not all insurance plans cover all cancer treatments, follow-up care, clinical trials, or prescription drugs for people who are considered “survivors.” Those with individual level coverage may have difficulty keeping and maintaining coverage. Some treatments and clinical trials are not covered by all health insurance policies.

Employment - Cancer can force many survivors to think about their ability to maintain their current job, or wonder if they will still have a job when their treatment ends. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, at least 34 percent of uninsured adults and 11 percent of insured adults have been contacted by a collection agency about a medical bill. Seven percent of the uninsured and three percent of the insured have declared bankruptcy due to medical costs in the last five years. Other research states bankruptcy rates from medical expenses as high as 46.2 percent².

Pain Management Policies - Pain is one of the most common and most feared symptoms of cancer. Cancer survivors may experience both acute and chronic pain following their treatment. State laws, regulations, and guidelines, such as drug control laws and health professional regulations, can encourage or impair the quality of pain management.

Support, Family and Infertility Issues - People with cancer need a wide range of support from their family, friends and the community. Emotional issues may be a significant part of aftercare for cancer survivors.

End-of-Life - Facing the possibility of death from cancer is difficult. Hospice and palliative care are effective options to address the alleviation of physical or emotional pain and suffering when the goal is no longer a cure, but comfort.

References:

¹The American Cancer Society, <http://www.cancer.org/>.

²NCSL postcard on cancer survivorship, <http://www.ncsl.org>.

³The National Cancer Institute Office of Cancer Survivorship, <http://dccps.nci.nih.gov/ocs/>.

⁴National Conference of State Legislatures, cancer policy and information website, www.ncsl.org/programs/health/cancerweb.htm.

⁵The Centers for Diseases and Control, www.cdc.gov/cancer/index.htm.

⁶The National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship provides services and advocates for quality cancer care for all Americans, <http://www.canceradvocacy.org/>.

64% of adults whose cancer is diagnosed today can expect to be living in five years³

Breast cancer survivors make up the largest group of cancer survivors (22%) followed by prostate cancer survivors (17%)³

The majority (61%) of cancer survivors are aged 65 and older³

An estimated one of every six people over age 65 is a cancer survivor³

79% of childhood cancer survivors will be living five years after diagnosis³