Cancer Deaths Drop for Second Consecutive Year

Atlanta 2007/01/17 -An American Cancer Society report shows there was a drop of 3,014 cancer deaths in the United States from 2003 to 2004, the most recent year for which mortality data are available from the National Center for Health Statistics. This drop was significantly larger than the 369 fewer deaths reported for the previous time period (2002 to 2003), which itself marked the first decline in actual number of cancer deaths in the more than 70 years since nationwide data began to be compiled.

These figures, as well as estimates for the current year, come from Cancer Statistics 2007, published in the January/February issue of CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians, as well as in the 56th edition of its companion publication, Cancer Facts & Figures 2007. Based on the latest data, American Cancer Society epidemiologists predict that approximately 1.44 million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer and 560,000 will die from the disease in 2007.

In 2004, there were 553,888 deaths from cancer, compared to 556,902 in 2003. Drops in cancer deaths were seen across all four major cancer sites in men and women (lung, breast, prostate, and colorectal) in 2004, except for lung cancer among women. Colorectal cancer showed the largest decrease in the number of deaths. While the death rate for all cancers combined has decreased in the United States since 1991, not until 2003 was the decrease large enough to outpace the aging and growth of the U.S. population, resulting in two consecutive years of dropping cancer deaths. The larger drop in cancer deaths in 2004 is evidence that the decline may continue. Still, the report points out that although progress continues to be made in reducing mortality rates, cancer remains the top cause of death in Americans under age 85.

“This second consecutive drop in the number of actual cancer deaths, much steeper than the first, shows last year’s historic drop was no fluke,” said John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., American Cancer Society chief executive officer. “Everyone involved in the fight against cancer should be proud of this remarkable achievement. The hard work towards preventing cancer, catching it early, and making treatment more effective is paying dramatic, lifesaving dividends. Thirteen years of continuing drops in the overall cancer death rate have now overtaken trends in aging and growth of the U.S. population, resulting in decreased numbers of deaths.”

The American Cancer Society projects there will be 559,650 deaths from cancer in 2007; 289,550 among men and 270,100 among women. The Society also predicts there will be 1,444,920 new cases of cancer in 2007; 766,860 among men and 678,060 among women.

Beginning with this year’s estimated new cancer cases, the American Cancer Society introduced a new, more accurate projection method. The method was developed by researchers at the National Cancer Institute. It uses cancer incidence data from cancer registries covering about 86 percent of the U.S. population, compared to the previous method, which used data from registries covering about 10 percent of the population. While the new method predicted a similar number of total cancer cases for 2007 (new: 1,444,920; old: 1,419,000; a 1.8 percent difference), there were several cancer sites for which the predictions by the new method differed substantially from predictions made by the old method. The predicted number of breast cancers among women was 15.2 percent lower using the new method compared to the old method. Society epidemiologists believe the new estimate is more accurate because it reflects the lower incidence rates of breast cancer in the U.S. population as a whole compared to the populations covered in previous databases, as well as the recently reported drop in breast cancer incidence. The new method also resulted in increases in estimated lung cancer and leukemia cases (15.3 percent and 23.4 percent, respectively) and a drop in estimated prostate cancer cases (5.5 percent). In all cases, the newer numbers are believed to be more accurate, according to Ahmedin Jemal, PhD, lead author of Cancer Statistics and Cancer Facts and Figures.

Dr. Jemal notes that the new method marks a milestone in cancer surveillance because it accounts for cancer incidence in more than 86 percent of the U.S. population as well as other factors that

influence cancer risk. The cancer incidence and survey data were collected by the Centers for Disease Control, the National Cancer Institute, the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries, the U.S. Census Bureau, state and local health agencies, and thousands of cancer registrars throughout the country.

Since 1952, when the first edition of Cancer Facts & Figures consisted of four typewritten pages, the American Cancer Society's annual estimates of cancer incidence and deaths has become a critical tool for scientists and public health experts, policymakers, and others watching cancer trends. The annual estimates of new cancer cases and deaths are some of the most widely quoted cancer statistics in the world. The Society's leading team of epidemiologic researchers compiles and analyzes incidence and mortality data from around the country to estimate the number of new cancer cases and deaths for the current year nationwide and in individual states. Highlights from this year's publications:

- In 2007, 1,444,920 new cancer cases and 559,650 deaths, or about 1,500 deaths per day, from cancer are expected in the United States.
- Among men, cancers of the prostate, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum account for more than half (54 percent) of all newly diagnosed cancers. Prostate cancer alone accounts for nearly a third (29 percent) of cases in men.
- The three most commonly diagnosed types of cancer among women in 2007 will be cancers of the breast, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum, accounting for more than half (52 percent) of estimated cancer cases in women. Breast cancer alone is expected to account for one in four (26 percent) new cancer cases among women.
- Lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death in women in 1987. Lung cancer is expected to account for 26 percent of all female cancer deaths in 2007.
- Cancer incidence rates stabilized in men from 1995 to 2003 and increased in women by 0.3 percent per year from 1987 to 2003. Death rates for all cancer sites combined decreased by 1.6 percent per year from 1993 to 2003 in males and by 0.8 percent per year in females from 1992 to 2003.
- Mortality rates have continued to decrease across all four major cancer sites in men and in women except for female lung cancer, in which rates continued to increase by 0.3 percent per year from 1995 to 2003.
- Death rates from all cancers combined peaked in 1990 for men and in 1991 for women. Between 1990/1991 and 2003, death rates from cancer decreased by 16.3 percent among men and by 8.5 percent among women
- Lung cancer incidence rates are declining in men and appear to be plateauing in women after increasing for many decades.
- Colorectal cancer incidence rates decreased from 1998 through 2003 in both males and in females.
- Female breast cancer incidence rates leveled off from 2001 to 2003 after increasing since 1980, which may reflect the saturation of mammography utilization and dramatic reduction in hormone replacement therapy use that followed publication of the Women's Health Initiative in 2002.
- Among males under age 40 years, leukemia is the most common fatal cancer, while cancer of the lung and bronchus predominates in men aged 40 years and older.
- Among females, leukemia is the leading cause of cancer death before age 20 years, breast cancer ranks first at age 20 to 59 years, and lung cancer ranks first at age 60 years and older.
- From 2003 to 2004, the number of recorded cancer deaths decreased by 1,160 in men and by 1,854 in women. The largest change in number of deaths from the major cancers was for colorectal cancer in both men and women (decreased by 1,110 and 1,094, respectively).
- African American men have a 15 percent higher incidence rate and 38 percent higher death rate than white men. African American women have a nine percent lower incidence rate, but an 18 percent higher death rate than white women for all cancer sites combined.
- Among other racial and ethnic groups, cancer incidence and death rates are lower than those

in whites and African Americans for all cancer sites combined and for the four most common cancer sites.
- Cancer is the second leading cause of death among children between ages one to 14 years in the U.S., after accidents. The five-year relative survival rate among children for all cancer sites combined improved from 58 percent for patients diagnosed in 1975 to 1977 to 79 percent for those diagnosed in 1996 to 2002.

“The drops in cancer deaths we’re seeing are a cause for celebration; the hard work of millions is paying off. But they come at a time of great concern about future progress,” said Richard C. Wender, M.D., national volunteer president of the American Cancer Society. “The adoption of tobacco control policies across the country has contributed to our remarkable progress against cancer, but these gains are threatened by cutbacks in funding for research and prevention programs. A few years after our nation doubled its investment in medical research, Congress cut cancer funding for the first time in more than a decade. I hope today’s news demonstrates that the resources spent on this fight have been worthwhile and inspires our lawmakers to recommit themselves to it.”

Estimates of the expected numbers of new cancer cases and cancer deaths should be interpreted cautiously. These estimates may vary considerably from year to year, particularly for less common cancers and in states with smaller populations. Despite these limitations, the American Cancer Society’s estimates of the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the current year provide reasonably accurate estimates of the burden of new cancer cases and deaths in the United States. Such estimates will assist in continuing efforts to reduce the public health burden of cancer.

Each year, Cancer Facts & Figures features a Special Section highlighting a particular aspect of cancer prevention, early detection or treatment. Tobacco, obesity, infectious causes of cancer, and environmental pollutants have been discussed in recent years. In 2007, the special section looks at cancer-related pain. Pain is one of the most common symptoms associated with cancer. Approximately one in three patients newly diagnosed with cancer; 30 to 50 percent of patients undergoing treatment; and 70 to 90 percent of patients with advanced cancer experience pain. Regardless of the stage of disease or recovery, pain associated with cancer can almost always be relieved by proper treatment. Although control of pain can improve a person’s quality of life, cancer pain often goes untreated, under treated, or improperly treated. The special section describes the types of cancer-related pain and methods of pain assessment and treatment. It also addresses the issue of under treatment of cancer pain as well as educational and legislative initiatives to ensure that all cancer patients receive adequate pain control. The full report can be viewed after embargo at www.cancer.org/statistics.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.
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