People with Cancer History More Likely to Change Prescriptions to Save Money

Non-elderly, those enrolled in high-deductible plans more likely to seek cheaper medication



A new study led by American Cancer Society investigators finds that cancer survivors are more likely to change their prescription drug use for financial reasons that those without a cancer history.

The rising cost of cancer drugs imposes a significant financial burden on patients with cancer and their families. The direct medical cost of a new cancer medication per patient can routinely exceed $100,000 annually. Rising deductibles, copayments, coinsurance, and tiered drug formularies have led to an increasing portion of cancer drug cost being is shifted to the patient as out-of-pocket (OOP) costs. The increasing number of expensive, patient-administrated, oral antineoplastic agents may increase the likelihood that patients with cancer may delay, skip, or even forgo their prescription medications for financial reasons.

Investigators used the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) to compare responses from nearly 9,000 people with a history of cancer to more than 93,000 respondents without a cancer history. They found 31.6% of recently diagnosed and 27.9% of previously diagnosed cancer survivors reported any change in prescription drug use for financial reasons, compared with 21.4% of individuals without a cancer history.

Non-elderly cancer survivors enrolled in high-deductible plans were more likely to ask their doctor for lower cost medication (32.2% vs. 22.5%). As the number of comorbid conditions increased, so did the likelihood of reporting any change in prescription drug use. Changes in prescriptions were particularly evident in the non-elderly population, likely because of the near universal enrollment in Medicare, which may reduce the impact of medication cost on changes in prescriptions.

The authors conclude that health care policies that help cancer survivors address the financial burden of prescription drugs should target those who have multiple comorbid conditions and high-deductible health plans.

Article: “Do cancer survivors change their prescription drug use for financial reasons? Findings from a nationally representative sample in the United States.” Zhiyuan Zheng, Xuesong Han, Gery P. Guy Jr., Amy J. Davidoff, Chunyu Li, Matthew P. Banegas, Donatus U. Ekwueme, K. Robin Yabroff, and Ahmedin Jemal. CANCER; Published Online: February 20, 2017 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.30560).

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