Study Finds Link Between Obesity and Economic Burden of Nearly $20 Billion Among Cancer Survivors in the United States

A new American Cancer Society study links obesity with substantial economic burden of nearly $20 billion in 2016 among long-term cancer survivors in the United States with one-third attributable to survivors with severe obesity. The study appearing in *CANCER*, finds for long-term cancer survivors in the U.S. on average, each survivor with obesity (BMI≥30kg/m^2) had health spending of over $3000 more on medical care annually than normal-weight cancer survivors (18.5 kg/m^2 <BMI≤25kg/m^2), with the main contributors being hospital inpatient and prescription drug spending. The excess medical spending was magnified in cancer survivors with severe obesity (BMI≥40kg/m^2), with over $5000 per person per year, or nearly 7 billion in the nation in 2016.

Prior studies had projected that health care spending associated with cancer to be $201 billion in 2020 in the In the U.S. Investigators led by Xuesong Han, PhD, estimated the excess health care utilization and medical spending associated with obesity among long-term cancer survivors. They used a nationally representative sample of long-term cancer survivors, to provide the first national estimate of the economic burden associated with obesity among long-term cancer survivors in the U.S.

“The study found substantial excess medical spending associated with obesity highlighting the critical importance of lifestyle interventions and weight management in cancer survivors,” said Han. “In addition to other health benefits, maintaining a healthy body weight for cancer survivors may also reduce healthcare utilization and economic burden.”

Cancer survivors account for 5% of the U.S. population and 10% of the U.S. total medical spending. Excess body weight may increase care utilization and medical spending for survivors of all cancer types given its effects on the increased risk of secondary cancer, higher likelihood of other obesity-related comorbidities such as diabetes, arthritis, and heart diseases, and poorer quality of life. The study found excess care utilization and medical spending associated with obesity in both female and male cancer survivors, although the associations were of a greater magnitude among women.

“Policies and practices promoting a healthy lifestyle and achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight for cancer survivors may reduce healthcare utilization and economic burden,” write the authors. “With the increasing prevalence of cancer survivorship and high costs of cancer care, prevention, including promotion of healthy lifestyles, is considered a cost-effective and potentially cost-saving strategy for reducing the economic burden of cancer.”

Article: Han X, Jemal A, Zheng Z, Noguiera L, Khushalani J, Chen Z, Yabroff KR. Association of Obesity and Annual Health Care Utilization and Spending among Long-term Cancer Survivors. *CANCER*. doi: 10.1002/cncr.33482.