Palliative Care Remains Underused Among Young Adults With Advanced Cancer in U.S.

CHICAGO, October 10, 2025 — Although palliative care use has increased over time among young adults with advanced cancers in the United States, new research led by the American Cancer Society (ACS) found that utilization still remains very low. Palliative care focuses on improving the quality of life for individuals with serious or life-limiting illnesses. The report will be presented at the annual American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Quality Care Symposium in Chicago, October 10-11, 2025.

Researchers, led by Kewei (Sylvia) Shi, MPH, at the American Cancer Society, used the National Cancer Database to identify patients aged 18-39 who were newly diagnosed with stage-IV cancers. Outcomes included receipt of any palliative care, specialty palliative care (e.g. pain management) excluding palliative intent treatment, and any systemic treatment. Scientists examined the associations between individual-level and facility-level characteristics (e.g., safety-net burden) and each study outcome, adjusting for the year of diagnosis and state.

The study included a total of 76,666 patients. The percentage receiving any palliative care increased from 2.0% in 2010 to 4.8% in 2023. Use of systemic therapy also increased from 85.12% to 90.5%. Patients with pancreas (7.8%), lung (6.6%), and stomach (6.3%) cancers had the highest rates of palliative care. Compared to privately insured patients, those uninsured or with Medicaid were more likely to receive palliative care, but less likely to receive concurrent systemic treatment. Compared to patients treated at hospitals with the lowest safety-net burden, those treated at hospitals with higher safety-net burden were more likely to receive palliative care, but less likely to receive systemic therapy. When compared to patients treated at community cancer programs, patients treated at National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers were more likely to receive both palliative care and systemic therapy.

Researchers emphasized that the study highlights potential unmet needs for symptom management and shows targeted policies are necessary to ensure timely palliative care and comprehensive cancer care for this young, vulnerable population, especially with the increasing prevalence of early-onset cancers.

# # #

About the American Cancer Society
The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 110 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

For further information: FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: American Cancer Society, Anne.Doerr@cancer.org

---

Additional assets available online: Photos (1)