Young Leukemia and Lymphoma Patients Living Longer

Atlanta 2009/08/24 -A new analysis finds that adolescents and young adults diagnosed with blood-related cancers in recent years have better long-term survival rates than those who were diagnosed in the 1980s. Published early online and appearing in the November 1, 2009 print issue of CANCER, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study indicates that significant advances have been made in the treatment of 15 to 24 year-olds with leukemias and lymphomas; however, survival rates in this age group are still lower than those seen in younger children.

Few studies have looked at trends in the long-term survival of adolescents and young adults with blood-related cancers, which include Hodgkin's lymphoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, acute myeloblastic leukemia, and chronic myelocytic leukemia.

To compare survival rates of young patients diagnosed in recent years with those diagnosed two decades ago, researchers led by Dianne Pulte, M.D., of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, analyzed data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) database, a population-based cancer registry in the United States.

When the investigators compared SEER data from 1981-1985 with data from 2001-2005, they found that survival improved significantly in each of five blood-related malignancies. The 10-year survival rates increased from 80.4 percent to 93.4 percent among adolescents and young adults with Hodgkin lymphoma; from 55.6 percent to 76.2 percent for non-Hodgkin lymphoma; from 30.5 percent to 52.1 percent for acute lymphoblastic leukemia; from 15.2 percent to 45.1 percent for acute myeloblastic leukemia; and from 0.0 percent to 74.5 percent for chronic myelocytic leukemia.

Further analysis revealed that survival improved steadily over the two decades for the lymphomas and chronic myelocytic leukemia, but improvements in survival for the acute leukemias were limited to the early years and stable after the late 1990s. Also, with the exception of Hodgkin lymphoma, survival in adolescents and young adults still lags behind survival in children and, in the case of acute myeloblastic leukemia, even behind survival in older adults.

According to the authors, the persistent lower survival rates for acute leukemias in adolescents and young adults compared with children remain a major challenge. "More research into how to treat these diseases and how to make sure that all patients have access to the best treatment is needed," said Pulte.

Article: "Trends in survival after diagnosis with hematologic malignancy in adolescence or young adulthood in the United States, 1981-2005." Dianne Pulte, Adam Gondos, and Hermann Brenner. CANCER; Published Online: August 24, 2009 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.24548); Print Issue Date: November 1, 2009.

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