Two in Three Childhood Cancer Survivors Suffer Long-Term Side Effects

ATLANTA – August 31, 2015 – Two in three survivors of childhood cancer endure debilitating side effects and late effects from their cancer treatment that cause significant suffering throughout their lives, a sobering message as the nation observes Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September.

While cancers in children make up less than 1 percent of all cancers diagnosed each year, cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in in children ages 5 to 14. The American Cancer Society estimates that 10,380 children under the age of 15 will be diagnosed with cancer in the United States in 2015. Childhood cancer rates have been rising slightly for the past few decades. The reasons are unknown.

“Significant progress has been made against some of the most common pediatric cancers, leading to rising overall survival rates,” said Dr. Richard Wender, chief cancer control officer for the American Cancer Society. “But much of that progress is due to breakthroughs in the most common cancer: child leukemia. There are many types of childhood cancer for which there has been very little progress. New treatments are critical to improving survival rates for those childhood cancers that remain deadly. We must also increase efforts to minimize and treat the short and long-term side effects associated with the treatment of cancer in children.”

The Society currently supports 35 active, multiyear research grants for a total of nearly $18 million specific to childhood cancer. These grants include:

- Patrick Brown, MD, at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore is working to identify the genetic change in one type of childhood leukemia that continues to have a very low cure rate. Those whose leukemia cells have a mutation in a specific gene called MLL would benefit from improved therapy.
- Maciej Lesniak, MD, at the University of Chicago (Illinois), is working to re-engineer a virus that causes the common cold, empowering it to attack the cells within fast-growing brain tumors.
- Rani E. George, MD, Ph.D., at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston is exploring a genetic abnormality in the cells of neuroblastoma associated with resistance to treatment with crizotinib. The ultimate goal of this study is to develop treatment strategies for this pediatric tumor.

In addition, the Society’s advocacy affiliate, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), advocates at the state and federal level for increased funding and support for childhood cancer research and palliative care measures. ACS and ACSCAN are both active members of the Alliance for Childhood Cancer, a coalition of more than 25 member organizations dedicated to advancing childhood cancer issues. The Society also partners with the National Palliative Care Research Center (NPCRC) to fund research to advance integration of palliative care with curative treatment, including pediatric palliative care. ACS also has a partnership with Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC.org) to connect all practitioners to palliative care technical assistance, training, and resources that help systems and providers meet quality care standards.

About the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is a global grassroots force of 2.5 million volunteers saving lives and fighting for every birthday threatened by every cancer in every community. As the largest voluntary health organization, the Society's efforts have contributed to a 20 percent decline in cancer death rates in the U.S. since 1991, and a 50 percent drop in smoking rates. Thanks in part to our progress nearly 14 million Americans who have had cancer and countless more who have avoided it will celebrate more birthdays this year. We are determined to finish the fight against cancer. We're finding cures as the nation’s largest private, not-for-profit investor in cancer research,

ensuring people facing cancer have the help they need and continuing the fight for access to quality health care, lifesaving screenings, clean air, and more. For more information, to get help, or to join the fight, call us anytime, day or night, at 1-800-227-2345 or visit cancer.org.

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