

# **New Understanding of Cancer Care for Seniors, and the Well-Being of Cancer Caregivers**

## **Biennial Cancer Survivorship Research Conference Aims to Improve Quality of Life for Cancer Survivors and Their Families**

Atlanta 2008/06/20 -According to research presented today, many older cancer patients can tolerate more aggressive treatment than they typically receive, and age, income, and education all can impact the physical health of cancer caregivers. More than 400 of the nation's leading experts in cancer survivorship have convened for Cancer Survivorship Research: Mapping the New Challenges, where these and other findings about living with and beyond cancer are being presented this week. Researchers, health professionals, survivors and cancer advocates are here to discuss the latest scientific information on coping, health outcomes, and new directions in research and services for those living with a history of cancer, their caregivers and health care providers.

The biennial conference was initiated in 2002 to bring together investigators and clinicians involved in cutting-edge cancer survivorship research. This year's fourth conference is sponsored by the American Cancer Society's Behavioral Research Center, the National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Survivorship, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

One session today addressed both the dearth of study and possible under-treatment of the senior population, which makes up the largest portion of newly diagnosed cancer patients as well as the largest group of survivors. Researchers discussed why this group of cancer patients and survivors is not studied in proportion to its size, and called for the use of a comprehensive geriatric assessment to understand functional, physical, mental, pharmacotherapeutic and socio-economic factors that affect the course of disease and outcome of treatment decisions. It was revealed that, historically, treatment decisions for elderly cancer patients were often subjectively based on what an individual doctor believed the patient could tolerate. Today, new tools have been developed that provide clinicians with more objective assessment of health status that could lead to more seniors receiving more aggressive treatments offering a better chance at long-term survival.

Another panel of experts explored the ways in which caring for a family member at different points throughout a cancer experience can influence a person's own physical health. The panel found that older family members appear to adjust psychologically and spiritually to the caregiving role, but are at higher risk for adverse effects on their physical health. Family caregivers with lower education and income suffered from poorer physical health than those with more education and higher income levels. Researchers demonstrated that caregivers who received social support were in better health, suggesting that it is possible to improve family caregivers' quality of life.

The conference began Wednesday, June 18, with the opening session, "Beyond Support Groups and Survival: New Directions in Biobehavioral Research." It concludes mid-day on Friday, June 20, with a discussion on reaching the public with survivorship information, which will feature several prominent healthcare journalists from the national and Atlanta media. Other featured topics include quality of life for survivors of pediatric cancers, survivorship of recurrent cancers, and health disparities and cancer survivorship. Visit [Survivorship Conference](#) for more information.

**About the American Cancer Society** The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering, and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy, and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

**About the National Cancer Institute** The NCI, established under the National Cancer Institute Act of 1937, is the Federal Government's principal agency for cancer research and training. The National Cancer Act of 1971 broadened the scope and responsibilities of the NCI and created the National Cancer Program. The National Cancer Institute coordinates the National Cancer Program, which conducts and supports research, training, health information dissemination, and other programs with respect to the cause, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of cancer, rehabilitation from cancer, and the continuing care of cancer patients and the families of cancer patients. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI Web site at [National Cancer Institute](http://www.nationalcancerinstitute.gov), or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

**About the Lance Armstrong Foundation** The Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) unites people to fight cancer, believing that unity is strength, knowledge is power and attitude is everything. We provide the practical information and tools people battling cancer need to live life on their own terms. We take aim at the gap between what is known and what is done to prevent death and suffering due to cancer. We engage the public at large to pursue an agenda focused on preventing cancer, ensuring access to screening and care, improving the quality of life for people affected by cancer and investing in needed research. Founded in 1997 by cancer survivor and champion cyclist Lance Armstrong, the LAF is located in Austin, Texas. UNITE at [Lance Armstrong Foundation](http://www.lancearmstrongfoundation.org).

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