

Dying of not cancer good news for survivors

By ACSH Staff — April 5, 2012

Cancer therapies have come a long way in recent years, and for many, a cancer diagnosis is no longer a death sentence. In fact, a new study, presented at the American Association for Cancer Research meeting this week, indicates that about half of cancer survivors will end up dying from a disease [other than cancer](#) [1].

Researchers led by a Virginia Commonwealth University epidemiologist examined data from over 1,800 cancer survivors from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys between 1988 and 2004. The participants were followed for up to 17 years. Skin cancer patients were excluded from the study; participants were most likely to have survived breast, prostate, lung, cervical, or colorectal cancer. Of those patients who succumbed over the course of the follow-up period, nearly half died due to causes other than cancer, primarily cardiovascular disease. Predictably, the longer cancer survivors lived after their diagnosis, the more likely they were to die from something other than cancer.

One of the key messages the researchers emphasized, and that they hope clinicians ascertain from this study, is that, for cancer patients, treatment of the cancer itself should not come at the expense of managing other conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or cardiovascular conditions. After the detection of cancer, clinicians and cancer survivors pay less attention to the prevention and treatment of other diseases and complications, noted lead study researcher, Dr. Yi Ning. We shouldn't neglect other aspects of health because we are focused on cancer.

Furthermore, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan points out, this study demonstrates the impressive advances that have been made in cancer treatments. This is good news, she says. With current detection and treatment methods, many cancer survivors now live long enough that they end up dying of other conditions that more commonly cause death in the general population. And we can look forward to continuing progress in this area.

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