

CANCER TOPICS FOR GENERAL INTERNISTS

Cancer Survivorship

Larissa Nekhlyudov, MD, MPH

Dr. Nekhlyudov is associate professor of medicine at the Harvard School of Medicine and can be reached at Lnekhlyudov@partners.org.

Recent statistics released by the American Cancer Society reveal that there are currently more than 14 million individuals who have been diagnosed and are living with cancer. It is estimated that by 2024, there will be almost 19 million cancer survivors. There are approximately equal numbers of male and female survivors, with the most common cancers among the males being prostate (43%), colorectal (9%), and melanoma (8%). Among females, breast (41%), uterine corpus (8%), and colorectal (8%) cancers are most common. Frequently, survivors are living with chronic medical conditions that also require care. While primary care providers are seeing an increasing number of cancer survivors in their practices, general medical training in cancer primarily focuses on the acute phase in inpatient settings. Research shows that primary care providers' skills and confidence in caring for cancer survivors need improvement.

What do I do differently for cancer survivors?

In addition to standard high-quality primary care, cancer survivorship care must address:

1. *Surveillance for recurrences of the original cancer.* Cancer-specific recommendations for monitoring for recurrences exist and may include history, physical examination, blood work, and/or imaging. It is best to review the surveillance strategy with the treating oncology provider and determine who will complete evaluations when they are needed.
2. *Monitoring and management of late and/or long-term effects of cancer and its treatment.* Cancer survivors are at risk for a number of conditions that may arise during treatment or years later. For example, those treated with radiation may be at risk for secondary cancers in the field(s) of exposure, and those treated with chemotherapy may be at risk for cardiac dysfunction. Awareness and monitoring for such conditions are critical.
3. *Psychosocial care.* Survivors may be at risk for persistent depression, anxiety, and fear of recurrences. Monitoring and appropriate management are needed.
4. *Assessment of genetic risk for other malignancies.* It is important that primary care providers take a careful family history and refer the patient for genetic counselling and/or testing if several malignancies are identified.

How do I assess a survivor's risk for recurrences or late effects of treatment?

The Institute of Medicine report issued in 2006 recommends that all patients who complete cancer treatment be given a survivorship care plan that includes information about their treatment, plans for follow-up, possible late effects, resources, and care coordination. Several organizations have developed templates to create survivorship care plans. Survivorship care plans are/should be developed by oncology providers and shared with patients and their primary care physicians.

What if I don't get a treatment summary and care plan?

If you are caring for a new patient with a history of cancer, do your best to assess the type of cancer, date of diagnosis, and types of treatment received. Specifically, pay attention to the type of chemotherapy (i.e. names of drugs) and radiation therapy (i.e. amount of radiation and location on the body). Many helpful resources exist. Specifically, I would recommend UptoDate[®], now with an expanding section of topics on cancer survivorship, and Survivorship Guidelines from the Children's Oncology Group, which focuses on pediatric cancers while offering great practical information about late effects of chemotherapy and radiation. If you still feel uncertain, consult your local oncology group or cancer survivorship clinic, if available.

Resources

American Cancer Society. *Cancer Treatment and Survivorship Facts & Figures 2012-2013*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2012.
<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-033876.pdf>

American Society of Clinical Oncology Survivorship Care Compendium is a resource developed to serve as a repository of tools and resources to enable oncology providers to implement or improve survivorship care within their practices.
<http://www.asco.org/practice-research/asco-cancer-survivorship-compendium>

continued on page 2

CANCER TOPICS FOR GENERAL INTERNISTS

continued from page 1

Cancer Survivorship E-Learning Series is a free continuing education program that provides a forum to educate primary care providers to better understand and care for survivors in the primary care setting. <https://cancersurvivorshipcentereducation.org/>

Cancer Survivorship in Primary Care has a website that serves as a one-stop repository where primary care providers can access resources for medical information and clinical guidance. <http://www.cancerpcp.org>

The Children's Oncology Group

Long-Term Follow-Up Guidelines for Survivors of Childhood, Adolescent, and Young Adult Cancers is a resource for health care professionals who provide ongoing care to survivors of pediatric malignancies. <http://www.survivorshipguidelines.org/>

From Cancer Patient to Cancer Survivor: Lost in Transition (Institute of Medicine video) <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2005/From-Cancer-Patient-to-Cancer-Survivor-Lost-in-Transition/From-Cancer-Patient-to-Cancer-Survivor-Lost-In-Transition.aspx>

Hewitt M, Greenfield S, Stovall E, eds. From cancer patient to cancer survivor—lost in transition. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2006. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2005/From-Cancer-Patient-to-Cancer-Survivor-Lost-in-Transition.aspx>

UpToDate® is an evidence-based resource aimed at helping clinicians make decisions in clinical practice and now includes a section on cancer survivorship, with an expanding list of topic reviews. <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/search?search=cancer+survivorship&x=0&y=0> *SGIM*