

Cancer: the Number Two Cause of Death!

Summary of Significant Trends:

Cancer is the second leading cause of death for both males and females of all races in North Carolina. In 2001 there were 16,047 North Carolinians who died from cancer.¹ One in four deaths in the United States is caused by cancer. Age-adjusted cancer death rates declined in males and females in the 1990's, though the magnitude of decline is substantially higher in males than in females. In contrast, incidence rates continued to increase in females while stabilizing in males. African-American males showed the largest decline for mortality. However, African Americans still carry the highest burden of cancer with diagnosis of cancer at a later stage and poorer survival within each stage compared with Whites. In spite of the continued decline in cancer death rates in the most recent time period, the total number of recorded cancer deaths in the United States continues to increase slightly due to the aging and expanding population.²

Emerging Trends and Issues:

It is estimated that about 556,500 Americans will die from cancer, corresponding to 1,500 deaths each day of 2003. Cancers of the lung and bronchus, prostate, and colon and rectum in men, and cancers of the lung and bronchus, breast, and colon and rectum in women continue

to be the most common causes of cancer death. These four cancers account for slightly more than half of the total cancer deaths among men and women. Lung cancer is expected to account for 25% of all female cancer deaths in 2003.²

Cancer incidence and mortality rates vary considerably among racial and ethnic groups. Overall, African Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates for cancer. The incidence rate for African Americans is about 10% higher than in Whites, 50 to 60% higher than in Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders, and is more than twice as high as the rate for Native Americans. Similarly, the death rate from all cancers combined is about 30 percent higher in African Americans than among Whites and more than twice as high as cancer death rates in Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Hispanics.²

Shifts and refinements in nutritional guidelines for cancer prevention are inevitable as studies are completed. Reflecting this, the 2001 American Cancer Society guidelines on nutrition and physical activity for cancer prevention showed a shift as new findings caused the focus to change. Increased emphasis is now given to the goals of maintaining a healthy weight and engaging in regular physical activity. In the last several years research has shown that regular physical activity will reduce risk of colon and breast cancer. Evidence is also now firm that overweight and obesity are related to higher

risks of cancers of the colon, kidney, endometrium, breast (after menopause), and lower esophagus. After avoiding tobacco, staying lean and active provide the greatest potential for minimizing cancer risk.³

Formerly a reduction in total fat consumption was emphasized. Evidence is now conclusive that reductions in intake of some forms of unsaturated fat will actually increase risks of cardiovascular disease, thus, the current focus is on limiting consumption of red meat, which contains less healthy forms of fat and has been associated with cancer risk in many studies. While excessive dietary fat can contribute to obesity, over consumption of carbohydrates will have the same effect. Thus limiting calories from all sources and increasing expenditure of calories by physical activity is emphasized.³

Advice to eat five or more servings per day of fruits and vegetables remains supported however only a modest reduction in cancer risk now thought to be likely based on the weak associations seen in recent research.³

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Many forms of cancer are largely preventable. Engaging in a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of cancer. People who are not overweight, do not smoke, exercise vigorously for 30 minutes a day or more, limit their consumption of red meat, and eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day will have the lowest risk for certain cancers. Although the task is daunting, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service is prepared to educate and disseminate reliable, non-biased, research-based information to all North Carolinians to lower their risk of certain cancers through diet and lifestyle change. Programs available include: Black Churches United For Better Health.

References:

1. North Carolina Center for Health Statistics. www.schs.state.nc.us/schs/
2. Jemal A. et al. Cancer Statistics, 2003. CA Cancer J Clin 2003; 53:5-26
3. Byers, T et al. American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention: Reducing the Risk of Cancer With Healthy Food Choices and Physical Activity. CA Cancer J Clin 2002; 52:92-119

Sources of Supporting Data:

National Cancer Institute www.nci.gov

American Cancer Society www.cancer.org

Primary Contact: Jackie McClelland, Ph.D.
Jackie_mccelland@ncsu.edu

2003



Family & Consumer
SCIENCE S