

Lifelines

from the National Cancer Institute



New Cancer Statistics Show Promise Overall, But African Americans Still Have Troubling Cancer Profile

By the National Cancer Institute

Every year, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) collaborates with other organizations to release the Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer. When this report is released, the question is always the same: Are we making any progress against cancer? This year, the report confirms that we are making advances in the fight against many types of this disease.

The Annual Report to the Nation reveals that, over the past decade or so, there has been a decrease of nearly 1 percent each year in the incidence of new cases of cancer and an even greater decline, of about 1.6 percent each year, in the rate of cancer deaths. It may not seem like much, but a drop of just 1 percent each year in the rates of new cancer cases and deaths is significant. That could be tens of thousands of people spared the pain of this disease in a given year. The decline in cancer rates can be attributed to aggressive efforts to reduce risk in large populations, to provide for early detection, and to develop new therapies.

However, in spite of this progress, disparities in cancer incidence and death still exist. The report shows that African American men still have the highest incidence of all cancers combined and that African American men and women have the highest overall rates of cancer deaths – and that is not good news. For many African Americans, cancer hits home too often. It has likely touched a member of your family, a co-worker, or a neighbor.

When it comes to cancer health disparities, research has uncovered some of the underlying factors that predispose some people to poorer outcomes. The most obvious factors are associated with a lack of health care coverage and low socioeconomic status. In particular, people of lower socioeconomic status often have lower access to screening and treatment and may be more likely to smoke, have a poor diet, drink too much alcohol, and be physically inactive. It is clear that more work needs to be done to get the very latest advances in screening, diagnosis and treatment – as well as information about how to improve personal health behaviors – to all Americans.

But according to this year's report, there are also reasons to be encouraged. For example, rates of death from colorectal cancer, a leading killer of African Americans, declined for African Americans, as they did for every racial/ethnic group. Prostate cancer incidence declined in both African American and Hispanic men, and breast cancer incidence dropped in African American women, as in women of other racial/ethnic groups.

So what does this mean for African Americans? NCI wants you to know that there are places to turn to for help and reliable information when you want to know more about cancer or when you are confronted with the disease. As the primary federal leader in cancer research, NCI continues to maintain a focus on cancer health disparities as a part of its portfolio of education, awareness, and research activities.

You can never know too much about cancer. There are numerous options to access the many publications and other educational materials offered by NCI. If you prefer to search the Internet, visit the NCI Web site, www.cancer.gov. Our site links you to a wide variety of cancer education and awareness materials, from publications to updates about research. You can also order free publications at the Web site. Or, if you prefer, you can use the telephone. Dial 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) to talk with an information specialist from NCI's Cancer Information Service.

For African Americans, knowledge is one of the primary keys to maintaining good health. Take advantage of every resource available to you to get smart about cancer.

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI Web site at www.cancer.gov or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

Related Resources:

- Annual Report to the Nation Finds Continued Declines in Overall Cancer Rates; Special Feature Highlights Current and Projected Trends in Colorectal Cancer (<http://www.cancer.gov/newscenter/pressreleases/ReportNation2009Release>)
- Archive of the Annual Reports to the Nation (http://www.seer.cancer.gov/report_to_nation/archive.html)
- NCI's Cancer Information Service (CIS) (<http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/cis>)
- Colon and Rectal Cancer (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/colon-and-rectal>)