

Many cancer survivors face health-related quality of life issues

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Oct. 30, 2012 – Beating cancer is just the first step.

More than one third of the 12.6 million [cancer survivors](#) in the United States have physical or mental problems that put their overall health in jeopardy, according to researchers at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center.

Their study, published in the October issue of the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, found that 25 percent of cancer survivors reported poor physical health and 10 percent reported poor mental health as compared to 10 percent and 6 percent, respectively, of adults without cancer.

The study was funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Until now, we didn't have clear data on quality-of-life issues for the population of U.S. cancer survivors," said the study's lead author, Kathryn Weaver, Ph.D., assistant professor of social sciences and health policy at Wake Forest Baptist. "This information should help doctors and researchers identify groups of survivors who may be at risk for long-term problems after cancer. In addition, it can help us know if some of the national efforts to improve life for cancer survivors are making a difference."

For the study, researchers analyzed data from a 2010 nationwide health survey conducted by the CDC that included data specific to cancer survivors collected by the CDC and the NCI. The scientists identified 1,822 cancer survivors and compared them with 24,804 adults with no history of cancer.

Survivors of breast cancer, prostate cancer and melanoma fared best, with health-related quality of life levels equivalent to or better than those of adults with no cancer history, according to the study.

In contrast, 40 percent of survivors of cervical, blood and colorectal cancers and survivors of cancers with a five-year survival rate of less than 25 percent (including cancers of the liver, lung and pancreas) were more likely to report physical problems that had a negative impact on their quality of life. In addition, survivors in the latter group were more likely to report mental health issues that affected their day-to-day lives.

The researchers estimated that about 3.3 million cancer survivors in the United States have poor physical health-related quality of life and almost 1.4 million have poor mental health-related quality of life.

"Recently, there has been a strong push for doctors to do a better job of communicating with cancer patients about what to expect as they finish treatment and transition to the survivor period," Weaver said.

"Identifying what symptoms or problems cancer patients are facing after treatment – fatigue, pain, depression, sleep and cognition problems – and connecting them with the right resources or treatments is key to improving their long-term health."

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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