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ARE PHYSICIANS HELPING CANCER SURVIVORS LIVE HEALTHY LIVES?

AUGUST 26, 2019 - A recent study indicates that certain physicians who care for patients with cancer do not often promote healthy lifestyle changes to cancer survivors, and they may fear that providing such advice would distress or overwhelm patients. Published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings are noteworthy because maintaining a healthy lifestyle is especially important to the long-term well-being of cancer survivors.

Cancer survivors face increased risks of cardiovascular disease and other conditions, and guidelines advise physicians—including oncologists—to encourage cancer survivors to adopt healthy lifestyles to help protect their long-term health.

To investigate the extent to which physicians follow these recommendations, a team led by Tammy Stump, PhD, and Bonnie Spring, PhD, faculty at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, surveyed 91 physicians: 30 primary care physicians; 30 oncologists; and 31 specialists (urologists, gynecologists, and dermatologists) who treat survivors of prostate cancer, breast cancer, and melanoma, respectively. Interviews also were conducted with 12 of the oncologists who were sent the survey.

Among primary care physicians, 90 percent reported recommending health promotion such as weight loss and smoking cessation to at least some cancer survivors. However, only 26.7 percent of oncologists and 9.7 percent of specialists said they ever did so.

In interviews, oncologists expressed fear that promoting healthy lifestyle changes would distress or overwhelm patients. They also noted that they often lack the time and training to make such recommendations to patients. Most physicians believed that at least half of cancer survivors would take their medications properly to prevent cancer recurrence, but they believed that patients would not do so if they were also trying to lose weight

“Even though oncologists clearly believe that cancer survivors should adopt a healthy lifestyle, they don’t have the time to address more than cancer care—that’s their expertise,” said Dr. Stump. “Ultimately, we believe that healthy lifestyle support can be provided to cancer survivors most effectively as part of

integrated survivorship care delivered by health promotionists trained in nutrition, physical activity, and behavioral coaching in a program designed with the input of oncologists to meet the specific needs of cancer survivors,” added Dr. Spring.

Full citation: “Physicians’ perspectives on medication adherence and health promotion among cancer survivors.” Tammy K. Stump, June K. Robinson, Betina Yanez, Frank Penedo, Adaeze Ezeofor, Sheetal Kircher, and Bonnie Spring. *CANCER*; Published Online: August 26, 2019 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.32410). URL Upon Publication: <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/cncr.32410>

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ASPIRIN MAY INTERACT WITH CELLS’ DNA MODIFICATIONS TO ALTER BREAST CANCER OUTCOMES

AUGUST 12, 2019 - A New findings suggest that women with specific DNA characteristics in certain areas of the genome may live longer if they take aspirin before they are diagnosed with breast cancer. Published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings point to the need for studies on the potential of aspirin to prevent or treat breast cancer in some individuals.

It is often unclear why some patients benefit from a particular therapy while others do not. In some cases, gene sequences play a role, but in other cases, chemical modifications to DNA may be important. The latter are termed epigenetic changes, and they include a process called DNA methylation.

Tengteng Wang, PhD, MSPH, and her mentor Marilie Gammon, PhD, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wondered whether DNA methylation may influence the effects of aspirin in patients with breast cancer. The team examined DNA methylation in breast tumor tissues—including at DNA sites that control the expression of 13 breast cancer-related genes—and also in cells circulating in patients’ blood. The study is the first to examine the effect of DNA methylation on the association between aspirin use and mortality in women with breast cancer.

In the study of 1266 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer during the 1996–1997 period, 476 died from any cause and 202 died specifically from breast cancer by the end of 2014. In women who used aspirin, the risk of dying from any cause and the risk of dying from breast cancer was lower among those whose DNA was not methylated in the region that controlled expression of the breast cancer-related BRCA1 gene. Other methylation patterns related to aspirin use and mortality were also observed.

The authors noted that the findings could help identify individuals who may benefit from aspirin after a breast cancer diagnosis due to their cells’ DNA methylation profile. Future research should consider a more comprehensive DNA methylation profile in order to better characterize women who are at risk.