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Medical management of another condition may not lead to early cancer diagnosis

DURHAM, N.C. -- Being in regular contact with healthcare providers because of a chronic illness such as diabetes or heart disease doesn't necessarily mean a person is more likely to have a cancer detected early, according to a study led by Duke University Comprehensive Cancer Center researchers.

"We speculated that patients who were being medically managed for conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes might be diagnosed sooner since they interact with the health care system so often," said Yousuf Zafar, a fellow in hematology-oncology at Duke and lead investigator on the study. "But it turns out that was not the case."

Zafar will present the results of the study in a poster presentation at the American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting in Chicago on Saturday, June 2. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Pfizer Oncology.

These results have implications for how people with co-morbidities at the time of cancer diagnosis might be treated, Zafar said.

"Currently, patients with multiple co-morbidities don't have access to the same types of clinical trials that are open to other patients," Zafar said.

The researchers expect to investigate ways in which to get some of these co-morbidity patients into cancer clinical trials, which can offer new treatment options that might produce better results, Zafar said.

Zafar said an important takeaway message is that screening is important, whether or not you are seeing a doctor frequently.

"It is always important to get age-appropriate cancer screening," Zafar said.

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