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Young leukemia and lymphoma patients live longer today than in years past

A new analysis has found that adolescents and young adults who were recently diagnosed with blood-related cancers have better long-term survival rates than those who were diagnosed in the 1980s. Published in the November 1, 2009 issue of *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study indicates that significant advances have been made in the treatment of 15 to 24 year-olds with leukemias and lymphomas; however, survival rates in this age group are still lower than those seen in younger children.

Few studies have looked at trends in the long-term survival of adolescents and young adults with blood-related cancers, which include Hodgkin's lymphoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, acute myeloblastic leukemia, and chronic myelocytic leukemia.

To compare survival rates of young patients diagnosed in recent years with those diagnosed two decades ago, Dianne Pulte, MD, of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and her colleagues analyzed data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) database, which is a population-based cancer registry in the United States.

When the investigators compared SEER data from 1981-1985 with data from 2001-2005, they found that survival significantly improved in each of the five blood-related malignancies. The 10-year survival rates increased from 80.4 percent to 93.4 percent among adolescents and young adults with Hodgkin's lymphoma; from 55.6 percent to 76.2 percent for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma; from 30.5 percent to 52.1 percent for acute lymphoblastic leukemia; from 15.2 percent to 45.1 percent for acute myeloblastic leukemia; and from 0 percent to 74.5 percent for chronic myelocytic leukemia.

When they analyzed the data further, the researchers found that survival improved steadily over the two decades for the lymphomas and chronic myelocytic leukemia, but survival was stable during the late 1990s and early 21st century for the acute leukemias. Also, with the exception of Hodgkin's lymphoma, survival in adolescents and young adults still lags behind

survival in children and, in the case of acute myeloblastic leukemia, even behind survival in older adults.

According to the authors, the persistent lower survival rates for adolescents and young adults with acute leukemias compared with children with these diseases remain a major challenge. "More research into how to treat these diseases and how to make sure that all patients have access to the best treatment is needed," said Pulte.

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Article: "Trends in survival after diagnosis with hematologic malignancy in adolescence or young adulthood in the United States, 1981-2005." Dianne Pulte, Adam Gondos, and Hermann Brenner. *Cancer*; Published Online: August 24, 2009 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.24548); Print Issue Date: November 1, 2009.
