



spotlight on health

Treating Cancer Should Not Eclipse Quality Of Life

(NAPSA)—Today, with an arsenal of therapies and the expertise of physicians, patients with cancer are living longer. But are they living better?

Maintaining quality of life is difficult; especially when the medicine intended to help also causes great discomfort in the process. Chemotherapy, which fights cancer, often has side effects that discourage patients from eating.

Approximately 1.2 million patients receive chemotherapy in the U.S. each year. According to experts, up to 85 percent of patients experience nausea and vomiting. When a patient doesn't eat or is unable to keep food down, he or she is at risk for malnutrition and dehydration, which may lead to weight loss.

But in a recent national survey of patients with cancer, 70 percent said their doctors "never" or "rarely" discussed nutrition as it pertained to cancer treatment.

In the survey, more than half of the patients who underwent chemotherapy encountered weight loss, with 80 percent losing more than 10 pounds from the time they started treatment. Even a drop of 10 pounds is a sign of chemotherapy beginning to take its toll.

According to Issam Makhoul, M.D., from the University of Arkansas for Medical Services, "If we can't maintain a patient's weight, we know we're losing the battle."

After a bone marrow transplant and chemotherapy, Nathan Ehrlich, 20, stopped eating due to nausea, and as a result experienced dramatic weight loss. "My weight fell from 160 to 125

Tips to relieve symptoms*

To relieve nausea or vomiting:

- Sip apple juice, grape juice or cool, lightly carbonated, caffeine-free beverages.
- Five or six smaller meals are better than three big ones.
- Avoid strong-scented foods or eat them at room temperature.

To stimulate your appetite:

- Eat in pleasant settings, with friends or in front of the TV to distract you.
- Have snacks handy should you decide to eat between meals.
- Arrange a schedule for your meals and snacks—keep to it even when you're not hungry.

*"Nutrition & Cancer Treatment: How to Increase & Maintain Your Appetite." CancerCare, 2003.



pounds," said Ehrlich. "But my doctor prescribed medications for my nausea, which helped me feel better and even gave me an appetite."

Of the patients involved in the survey mentioned above, only 39 percent had been given a prescription for nausea and vomiting.

There are several clinically proven medications that a physician may prescribe to relieve side effects. One is Marinol, which is FDA-approved synthetic THC—a pure, capsule version of the compound found in marijuana—which is used for appetite stimulation and relief of nausea and vomiting. Also, Zofran, Kytril and Anzemet are examples of serotonin antagonists—compounds that block your

brain from telling your body to expel food by vomiting. Also for nausea and vomiting, Decadron is a type of corticosteroid, which is similar to the natural hormone cortisone. The appetite stimulant Megace is a synthetic version of the female hormone progesterone.

"In the past, we asked patients to give up their lives to fight cancer," said Kristine A. Nelson, M.D., of the Cancer Treatment Research Foundation. "As a result, they lived with the pain, believing that since the chemotherapy is fighting the tumor, it's worth all the nausea and vomiting. But the treatment of the cancer must not overshadow the importance of managing the symptoms patients face."

CancerCare, the largest national non-profit organization of its kind, is dedicated to helping people face the many challenges of a cancer diagnosis. To help patients maintain proper nutrition, CancerCare has developed a brochure, titled "Nutrition & Cancer Treatment: How to Increase & Maintain Your Appetite." The easy-to-read information answers common questions patients have when facing side effects that affect their nutrition.

"The brochure is a tool to help both patients and their loved ones understand how to sustain the strength and energy necessary for the healing process," said Ellen Coleman, associate executive director of CancerCare. "It also establishes a partnership in which doctors and patients can work together toward maintaining quality of life during a very difficult time."

Visit www.cancercare.org to view the brochure or call 800-813-HOPE for more information.