



New options for people with rare cancers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — People with rare cancers have been out of luck — not only do most lack good treatments but drug companies also don't pursue them because of small potential sales. Now, a federal study that pools these folks gives them strength in numbers and new options.

The first results from this novel effort were revealed Sunday at an

American Association for Cancer Research conference in Atlanta. They suggest that for people with one of these unusual diseases, there seems to be a way to predict who will benefit from a drug combo that boosts the immune system and who will not.

Rare cancers collectively make up 22 per cent of all cancer cases, so doctors hope the study will find solutions for more of them.



FILE PHOTO

About half of those who fracture a hip have to accept that their days of independent living are over and the wheelchair becomes a part of life.

Shocking figures on falling

BY W. GIFFORD-JONES

GETTING older is a very dangerous disease. After all, no one leaves this planet alive unless you're an astronaut. But even astronauts face the same problems on earth as we do. As we all get older, we're likely to die from one of the big killers, heart failure, stroke, or cancer. But there's another threat, falling down. It's been said, "Never let a stumble in the road be the end of the journey." Sounds easy, but the figures of elderly falls would make the dead sit up and take notice.

The risk of falling increases with age, and is greater for women than men. Each year falls are reported by one-third of people over the age of 65 and is the leading cause of death.

It gets worse. More than half of falls involving people 75 and older are fatal. And 25 per cent of seniors who break a hip from a fall die within six months. Possibly the greatest tragedy is not to die, then have to face the fact that life as you knew it will never be the same again. About half of those who fracture a hip have to accept that their days of independent living are over and the wheelchair becomes a part of life. It's tough to lose your license to drive a car. But it's disastrous not to be able to walk.

This disaster can happen in a split second. One of my classmates at The Harvard Medical School, who became a distinguished professor, slipped on black ice one morning causing a severe fracture of pelvic bones. He told me, "My life changed immediately." So much so that, since the injury, it was impossible for him to return to class reunions even though he lives nearby.

Others may trip on a loose carpet, fail to see the last step on a staircase or suddenly lose their balance and fall for no apparent reason. These are not rare problems.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that each year 2.8 million people are treated in emergency departments for falling. And that 27,000 older adults died from complications.

A report from the University of California states the most dangerous myth is that falling is an inevitable part of aging. It stressed this need not be the case and that falls can be prevented. Another report in the Journal of the American Medical Association identifies the best

strategies to decrease these tragic falls. It reports that Canadian researchers studied 159,901 people age 65 and over. There was no doubt that exercising beat all other methods in preventing falls. Exercise helps to maintain the strength of muscles, flexibility, and balance. These good results came from either bicycling, yoga, tai chi, aerobic or even a brisk walk. Another strategy is to correct faulty vision.

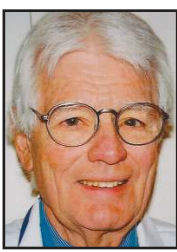
Researchers found that a combination of exercise along with good vision was the most effective way to prevent many falls.

Since more than half of the falls occur in the home we need to get smart about potential pitfalls. Remove electrical cords that could cause a fall. Place night lights in hallways, bathrooms and bedrooms, and wear shoes or slippers with non-slip soles. Be sure to install hand bars near toilets and in bathtubs and showers. Above all else be extra careful in bathrooms, especially if you are travelling. It pays to check foreign bathrooms carefully on arrival in a hotel.

There is another statistic that should make anyone who tends to fall take notice of current research. Reports show that two-thirds of those who fall, do so again within six months.

If this does happen and you have to spend time recovering, don't get depressed, and begin to feel sorry for yourself for being less careful. Remember, things can always be worse such as someone dying of terminal cancer. As one wise sage remarked, "There are many people suffering from worse conditions who would love to have one of your bad days!"

The Doctor Game runs each Tuesday in The Chronicle-Journal. Dr. Ken Walker (aka W. Gifford-Jones) has a private practice in Toronto. Please send comments to info@docgiff.com or visit docgiff.com.



THE DOCTOR GAME



PHOTO BY KRISTINA BARASKEWICH

Participants in the 2018 Hike for Hospice share personalized ribbons during remembrance ceremony at Boulevard Lake. This year's Hike for Hospice is set for May 5.

Hospice hikers share hope, remembrance

BY SUSAN WADE

EVERY day can seem like an endless journey for people and their families coping with life limiting illnesses. Now support is being offered one step at a time, through the simple act of walking.

On Sunday, May 5, the annual Hike for Hospice will be held at Boulevard Lake. The event launches National Palliative Care Week, but all the money raised here stays in our community.

The funds will help Hospice Northwest continue to offer compassionate companionship and services to almost 400 clients a year, including respite for families caring for loved ones and bereavement support.

"As those clients can attest our specially trained palliative care volunteers really do make a world of difference in people's lives," said Hospice Northwest's Kathleen Buso.

Hikers from all walks of life, ages and abilities are registering, each with their own deeply personal reasons for taking to the trails. For Hospice Northwest's new executive director Cherie Kok, watching close family members struggle with serious illness has inspired her to hike.

"Events like Hike for Hospice remind us we are a community and we need to help each other as a community," she said.

At the heart of the hike is the recognition and respect given to those who have struggled through illness and those who we have lost. Hospice Northwest recognizes the deep pain that can be experienced after the death of a loved one and the importance of coming together in



support and remembrance. The Hike for Hospice provides the opportunity for the grieving to participate in a healing remembrance ceremony, sharing their grief and channelling their loss into something positive.

The remembrance ceremony is two-fold. Each hike participant is given a beautiful flower as the hike begins. As hikers walk around Boulevard Lake, they are invited to find a spot near the water's edge to release their flowers into the water. They can then pause for a moment of contemplative silence, watching the flower float on the surface of the lake and feeling the love and celebration in their hearts for having known and loved this special person. Releasing the flower helps to lift away the pain and the burden of grief. A secret message of hope and renewal will be carried upon the water.

A new addition to the hike remembrance ceremony this year is the Butterfly Remembrance Wall. The beautiful wrought iron sculpture has been designed by local artist Luc Despres, and will be permanently installed in the Adelaide Street Butterfly Garden at Boulevard Lake. Butterflies are known as a symbol of transformation, hope, life, and spirit. Hospices across the country have adopted the butterfly as a symbol for remembering and honoring their loved ones.

The wall will provide an opportu-

nity for individuals to tie a personalized ribbon to the artwork in remembrance of their loved one. Even after the hike is over for another year, the wall will stand as a touching symbol of remembrance for all who visit the park.

"The Hike for Hospice is more than just a fundraising walk," says Hospice Northwest's Kathleen Buso. "It is an important community event which invites people to come together in love and remembrance. It also allows them to give back. People have the desire to help make a difference in the quality of life for those dealing with the challenges of a life-limiting illness."

The day is also meant to be about fun and celebrating community spirit. Hikers will be treated to entertainment by local performers. Prizes will be awarded to the top individual fundraiser and the top fundraising team. The winner for the Hike for Hospice 50/50 raffle and vacation raffle will also be drawn at the event.

Participants can register online at www.hikeforhospicetbay.ca. Early registration takes place on May 3 at the Hospice Northwest office, 63 Carrie St. from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Final chance to register will be on May 5 from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. at St. Ignatius High School prior to the Hike start 1:30 pm.

This monthly column from Hospice Northwest examines various aspects of palliative support and bereavement services. It appears on the Healthstyle page of The Chronicle-Journal on the first Tuesday of each month. Call Hospice Northwest at 626-5570 for more information.

Immune system therapy shows wider promise against cancer

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — A treatment that helps the immune system fight deadly blood cancers is showing early signs of promise against some solid tumors, giving hope that this approach might be extended to more common cancers in the future.

The treatment, called CAR-T therapy, involves genetically modifying some of a patient's own cells to help them recognize and attack cancer. Richard Carlstrand of Long Key, Florida, had it more than a year ago for mesothelioma, an aggressive cancer of the lining of the lungs.

"We were going into unknown territories" to try this, he said, but now he shows no sign of cancer and "I couldn't be happier."

Results on his and other cases were discussed Sunday at an American Association for Cancer Research conference in Atlanta.

The first CAR-T therapies were approved in 2017 for some leukemias and lymphomas. After being altered in the lab, the modified immune system cells are returned to the patient through an IV, which puts them right where the cancer is — in the blood. But that approach doesn't work well if the cells have to travel far through the bloodstream to get to tumors in the lung, breast, colon, or other places.

"Solid tumors are notorious for not letting the immune cells enter," and not enough may make it in to have an effect, said Dr. Prasad Adusumilli of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

A bigger worry is that the proteins on solid tumour cells that these therapies target also are found on normal cells at lower levels, so the therapy might harm them, too.

Adusumilli helped design a new CAR-T to try to avoid these problems

and tested it on 19 patients with mesothelioma and two others with lung and breast cancer, respectively, that had spread to the chest lining. About 150,000 patients in the U.S. each year face this situation.

The modified cells were injected directly into the chest where the tumors were. A genetic safety switch was added so a medicine could be given to destroy the cells if they caused harm.

After the therapy, one patient was able to have surgery and radiation, and is doing well 20 months later with no further treatment. Fifteen others were well enough to start on a drug that boosts the immune system in a different way.

Eleven of the 15 have been studied long enough to report results. Two had signs of cancer disappear for about a year, although one later relapsed. Six saw their tumors shrink. Three saw their cancer worsen.

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