Lifewire: Good news from cancer study

by Ven Griva

The American Cancer Society recently announced some happy news: Statistics show that deaths from cancer have declined for two straight years.

Not only have the number of deaths gone down, but they've gone down significantly.

According to Cancer Statistics 2007, there were 3,014 fewer cancer deaths in 2004, the most recent year for which complete statistics are available, compared with 2003. The report is published in the January/February issue of the journal CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians.

That number is significantly higher than the 369 fewer deaths reported between 2003 and 2002. That indicates the trend is more than just a statistical anomaly, scientists say.

"This second consecutive drop in the number of actual cancer deaths, much steeper than the first, shows last year's historic drop was no fluke," said American Cancer Society CEO John R. Seffrin. "The hard work toward preventing cancer, catching it early, and making treatment more effective is paying dramatic, lifesaving dividends."

A WAY TO GO

The news is good for most major types of cancer, according to the report. Yet there is a long way to go before cancer stops being a major killer in the United State.

The journal article and its companion piece, Cancer Facts & Figures 2007, are yearly American Cancer Society reports that estimate the number of cancer-related cases and deaths in the coming year.

For 2007, an estimated 1,444,920 new cases of cancer are expected, the report says, along with 559,650 cancer deaths.

American Cancer Society estimates for three major cancers in 2007 show:

- Breast cancer. In 2007, 178,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected. Breast cancer death rates have been dropping steadily since 1990, the report says, because of earlier detection and improved treatments. About 40,910 breast cancer deaths are expected in 2007.

- Prostate cancer. Death rates from prostate cancer are declining. About 27,050 deaths are expected in 2007. Some 218,890 new cases are foreseen.

- Colorectal cancer. Both incidence and death rates have dropped for colorectal cancer in recent years. Around 112,340 cases and 52,180 deaths are predicted for 2007.

- Lung cancer remains the top cancer killer among all Americans, the report shows. Around 160,390 deaths are expected in 2007. About 213,380 people are expected to develop lung cancer. Incidence and death rates among women have flattened in recent years, but fewer men are getting lung cancer or dying from it.

WHAT'S YOUR RISK?

One way to find out more about your cancer risk factors is to visit Great American Health Check at www.cancer.org. Under the heading "Resources for Healthy Living," scroll down to and click on Great American Health Check.

The program will ask you a number of questions regarding your height, weight, medical history, physical activity, and eating and drinking habits. You will be provided with an assessment of your cancer risks and an action plan to reduce your risks based on your answers.

The Great American Health Check is not a comprehensive survey of your health or a substitute for a doctor's visit. Instead, it is billed as a way to start a conversation with your doctor. The American Cancer Society suggests you visit your doctor to learn more about all aspects of your health.

BUTT OUT

The No. 1 thing anyone can do to reduce their risk of contracting cancer is to abstain from all tobacco products.

The 1982 Surgeon General's Report stated, "Cigarette smoking is the major single cause of cancer mortality in the United States." Scientists at the American Cancer Society say that statement is as true today as it was in 1982.

Smoking is responsible for nearly one in five deaths in the United States. Because cigarette smoking and tobacco use are acquired behaviors - activities that individuals choose to do - smoking is the most preventable cause of premature death in our society.

CIGAR SMOKE

The American Cancer Society also stresses that cigar smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco are just as risky to your health.

Whether inhaled or not, cigar smoking can be dangerous. If cigar smokers inhale, nicotine is absorbed as rapidly as it is with cigarettes. For those who do not inhale, it is absorbed more slowly through the lining of the mouth.

Cigar smoking increases your risk of death from several cancers, including cancer of the lung, lip, tongue, mouth, throat, esophagus and larynx. Studies have shown that male cigar smokers are four to 10 times more likely to die from oral and laryngeal cancers than nonsmokers.

In addition, when saliva containing cigar-smoke chemicals is swallowed, the esophagus is exposed to carcinogens. The death rate from esophageal cancer is several times higher in male cigar smokers than in males who have never smoked.

SNUFF AND CHEW

In 1986, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that the use of spit tobacco is not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes or cigars, as these products are addictive and can cause various cancers and noncancerous oral conditions. Some of these conditions are:

- Cancer of the mouth and pharynx.

- Leukoplakia, or white sores in the mouth that can lead to cancer.

- Gum recession, or peeling back of gums.

- Bone loss around the teeth.

- Abrasion of teeth.

- Bad breath.

The most serious health effect of spit tobacco is an increased risk of cancer of the mouth and pharynx. Oral cancer occurs several times more frequently among snuff dippers compared with non-tobacco users. The risk of cancer of the cheek and gums increases nearly 50-fold among long-term snuff users.

Lifewire: Good news from cancer study by Ven Griva