

The American Liver Foundation warns of an increase in U.S. liver cancer deaths

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Upward Trend Contrary to Decline in Deaths from Other Cancers

Deaths from liver cancer increased over the past year in both men and women, reported the American Liver Foundation, a national nonprofit organization that provides education, advocacy and research on behalf of the 30 million Americans affected by liver disease. This is despite recent news focusing on the overall decline in the number of deaths due to most cancers.

"We are overjoyed at the news about the overall decline in cancer deaths," said Dr. James Boyer, Chair of the Board of the American Liver Foundation. "However, it is important not to ignore the very clear fact that liver cancer is one of the few cancers that are claiming more lives. Although survival rates for liver cancer are slowly improving, more people are being diagnosed with the disease than ever before."

An estimated 16,780 Americans will die of liver cancer this year -- nearly 46 people each day. This is an increase of 580 deaths from the disease since 2006, and 4,000 deaths more than ten years ago. It is estimated that more than 19,000 new cases of liver cancer will be diagnosed in 2007. This is over 1000 cases more than the previous year and 6,000 more than 1997.

The majority of liver cancer can be linked to cirrhosis of the liver. Many liver diseases eventually cause cirrhosis, most notably hepatitis B and C and fatty liver disease. Over four million Americans have been infected with the hepatitis C virus and another 1.4 million have chronic hepatitis B. It is further estimated that 10-20% of all Americans have fatty liver disease.

"The increase in liver cancer is due to the near epidemic rates of many liver diseases. The hepatitis C virus, for example, is the fourth leading cause of liver cancer-related deaths in the U.S. That is why the Foundation is working every day to fight all forms of liver disease. The sooner any liver disease is detected and treated, the less chance it will develop into liver cancer," said Dr. Boyer.

Both hepatitis B and fatty liver can be prevented, through vaccine and weight control, respectively. And new antiviral treatments can help limit the damage caused by hepatitis C in some patients. But, while progress is being made in the research lab, in order to drive down rates of liver cancer, we urge Americans to focus immediately on liver wellness. Only when we stop the growth of liver disease in America can we slow down the increase in liver cancer.

Facts about liver cancer

* Liver cancer is the fourth leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide.

* Over 80 percent of liver cancer cases in the US can be linked to cirrhosis.

* Long-term infection with hepatitis B or C is linked to liver cancer because they often lead to cirrhosis. Hepatitis B can lead to liver cancer without cirrhosis.

* Fatty liver disease is also linked to both cirrhosis and liver cancer.

* The increase in hepatitis C infection and fatty liver disease in the US lead experts to believe that liver cancer rates will continue to increase.

* Early detection of liver cancer significantly improves a person's chance of survival.

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