

Pancreatic Cancer Patients' Choices Easier With New Study

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Almost 45,000 Americans are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer each year. No matter how the disease is treated, it almost always kills within two years after diagnosis, not leaving good odds for those diagnosed. Depending on the stage of the cancer, aggressive intervention with chemotherapy, surgery, or radiation may add an extra month to a year of survival, but unfortunately that is very rare.

Knowing this, should patients who know their time is ending soon spend a great amount of that little time undergoing aggressive and difficult treatment which will only add a brief period of additional life?

Dr. Casey Boyd, a University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston surgery resident, said:

"It's about balancing quality and quantity of life, really. For pancreatic cancer we know the quantity of life is short, so maximizing the quality of life is important- and the best way we can do that is to give patients concrete data that they can look at and use in their treatment decisions."

Boyd and her team analyzed SEER records for 25,476 pancreatic cancer patients by drawing on the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results database.

Their main focus was on 2 factors that directly influence patients' lives: hospital days and days spent in medical care. Hospital days were considered the days that were spent as a hospital inpatient and medical care days were the days in the hospital as well as other days on which the patient visited a doctor, needed testing done, or received treatment of any kind.

This study is important because it is the first to analyze both hospital and medical care days in pancreatic cancer patients with stage, treatment and survival, Boyd explained, which was able to give them a quantitative look at the whole experience of a patient with this disease. She hopes that this paper will help doctors give patients the information they need to make important decisions.

For example, when a doctor is explaining to a patient with metastatic pancreatic cancer, the most common and deadliest type, he could say, "If you have chemotherapy you may live four to six weeks longer, but a lot of that time you're going to be in the hospital, or getting a test, or getting a needle poked in your arm for your chemotherapy," she explained. "Some patients may say, I want that, I want the most life that you can give me."

Other patients could have a different view. They could decide to stop any treatments after having an accurate picture of the treatment experience. They could say, "It's not really worth it to me- it's a few extra weeks, but they may be miserable weeks." These patients may even just have hospice, or just spend time with loved ones, Boyd said.

The authors hope that this study will help patients make these difficult decisions a little easier.

She concluded:

"Really, this paper is about empowering the patient. We want to provide them with the information they need to make their own personalized treatment decisions."

Written by Sarah Glynn
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References:

[The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston](#)

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