

Unsung Heroes

An Introduction to the often-ignored world of



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What is Childhood Cancer?

- Childhood Cancer is the leading cause of death in children under 18 and is actually a collection of diseases.
- Children are diagnosed with many different forms of cancer. There are 12 major types of cancer that can affect the bones, muscle, blood, liver, kidney, brain, or even the eyes.
- Common adult cancers (lung, breast, colon, etc.) rarely occur in children or adolescents.



What is Childhood Cancer?

- Among the 12 major types, Leukemias (cancer in the blood) and brain tumors account for more than half of all cases.
- The median age at diagnosis is six years old.
- Some forms of pediatric cancer have a 5 year survival rate of more than 90%, while others have a 5 year survival rate of less than 2%.

What is Childhood Cancer?

- Every day in America, 46 children are diagnosed with cancer.
- Each year in the U.S. approx. 12,400 children between the ages of birth and 19 years of age are diagnosed with cancer.
- There is no known cause of childhood cancer, and it occurs regularly and randomly across all ethnic groups. Some children are even born with cancer.



Effects of Childhood Cancer

- Many adult cancer patients endure no more than a year of treatment.
- On the other hand, the average length of treatment for children, from initial diagnosis to cure or remission, is three years.
- If the child experiences a relapse, the treatment time could possibly be extended over many years with a potentially lowered prognosis.



The Need for Progress

- In 80% of cases, a child's cancer diagnosis is delayed until the disease is very advanced and has spread to other parts of the body. As a stark comparison, this only occurs in 20% of adult cancer cases.
- Childhood cancers tend to be more aggressive than adult cancers, so this late diagnosis can significantly affect the 5-year survival probability of the child.

The Need for Progress

- Today's pediatric cancer patients are still being treated with drugs that were developed in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's.
- Why? Because childhood cancer is rare, often called an 'orphan disease.' Therefore, drug development for this group of patients is not considered 'cost effective.'



The Need for Progress

- Some forms of pediatric cancer have seen an increase in survival over the past few decades but one in four children will still die.



- If formerly incurable types of cancer are being treated successfully with “old drugs,” imagine what progress could be made with new drugs!

The Need for Progress

- In the past 20 years, the FDA has only approved **ONE** new drug exclusively for pediatric patients.
- In the past 20 years, the prevalence of pediatric cancer has risen by 29%.



The Battle After Treatment

- Out of every 4 children diagnosed, one will not survive past 5 years and three will have life-long complications due to aggressive treatments for their cancer. When treatment stops, an entirely different battle begins...



The Battle After Treatment

- Because children's bodies are still developing, toxic therapies damage more than just the cancer cells.

Young cancer survivors live the remainder of their lives with the side-effects of their initial treatments.

A few of these side effects are:

- Delayed/ Disrupted cognitive development
- Stunted Growth
- Damaged speech and/or hearing
- Infertility and Endocrine Dysfunction
- Learning Disabilities
- Physical Handicaps due to nerve damage or amputation

The Battle After Treatment

- As many as 2/3rds of survivors have at least one chronic health effect.
- 25% of survivors have severe or life-threatening effects.
- 10% will develop a secondary cancer.
- Follow-up care is CRUCIAL. However, only 20% of children receive follow-up care. This is in stark contrast to the 90% adults who receive follow-up care.

Effects of Childhood Cancer

- Chemo and radiation make children feel sick and weak. They also make hair fall out. This can be very scary and makes children with cancer feel different from their peers. Often, these children are also coping with major trust issues, since the world no longer feels safe.

They often feel that their parents and other adults can no longer protect them, since each new adult is usually associated with a painful procedure.



Effects of Childhood Cancer

The child's entire family is affected.

- Because cancer usually strikes children at a young age, their families are often very young as well. There may also be other small children at home to look after.
- Sometimes, one or both parents must stop working in order to care for the sick child.



Effects of Childhood Cancer

- Siblings are often put to the wayside. Some may be constantly shuttled around and may have problems maintaining a normal schedule. They are worried, resentful, and feel abandoned.
- These children may develop behavioral problems, anxiety, or depression.
- They may also begin to have trouble in school.
- Counseling specifically for siblings is often necessary.



Effects of Childhood Cancer

- Children with cancer can best be helped by doctors who have specialized in treating pediatric cancer patients.
- These specialized treatment centers are spread across the country, so families must travel to get the best treatment for their children.



- This puts a financial, emotional, and social strain on the parents.

Effects of Childhood Cancer

- Parents can spend over 40 hours per week caring for their sick child.
- Studies have even shown that mothers of a child with cancer may exhibit symptoms similar to those of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- The effects on parents are almost always long term. If the child dies, parents deal with difficult and long-lasting grief. If the child lives, parents may still have to care for a child who has mild, moderate or severe physical or emotional late effects. They may spend the rest of their lives helping their child deal with those issues.

What Can You Do?

- Help scientists search for a cure by donating or fundraising to support childhood cancer research.
- Contact your **state representatives** and insist that childhood cancers be added to your state's cancer plan legislation.
- Volunteer for a childhood cancer organization.
- Start a support group or outreach organization.



You can also help your community become more cancer-aware and more supportive of local families and children who are fighting this devastating disease.

Please visit

www.acco.org

To find out how you
can help us
continue to provide
free materials and
services to children
and families.



Thank you for viewing this slideshow.

We hope you are motivated to help this most-worthy
cause.



... because kids can't fight cancer alone!

References

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