

Cancer survivors in the U.S. on the increase

By Marilyn Marchione, AP

CHICAGO – It's National Cancer Survivors Day, and chances are good that you know at least one of them.

Cancer survivors now number more than 14.5 million in the United States and are expected to grow to 19 million over the next decade, a report finds. More cancers are cured, more people are living longer with the disease and people are living longer in general, which boosts the number of cases and survivors because the risk of developing cancer rises with age.

"They're living longer and we hope with better quality of life," said Patricia Ganz of UCLA, whose research focuses on quality-of-life issues.

The American Cancer Society's report was released today during the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the world's largest group of specialists who treat the disease.

Here are five things to know about cancer:

Gender' influence

Survival varies by gender and cancer type. For male survivors, the most common cancers they faced were prostate, followed by colorectal and melanoma. For female survivors, the most common types were breast cancer, followed by uterine and colorectal.

Diagnosis timing

Two-thirds of today's cancer survivors were diagnosed at least five years ago, and 15 percent were diagnosed 20 or more years

ago.

Long lives

About half of cancer survivors are 70 or older. Only 5 percent are under age 40.

Lung cancer survival poor

Lung cancer is the most common malignancy in men and women, but it is so deadly that it ranks No. 8 among survivors. That may change with promising treatments on the horizon, said Gwen Darien, head of programs and services for Cancer Support Community, a nationwide support group.

The deadly skin cancer melanoma has seen a flurry of new treatments in recent years, and “that gives us hope for some of the other cancers where survival has not improved as much,” she said.

The road ahead

Cancer survivors are at greater risk of second cancers and need to be monitored closely for the rest of their lives. Darien is an example – she survived non-Hodgkins lymphoma 21 years ago and now is being treated for breast cancer.