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IN THIS ISSUE

Follow-Up Care for Childhood Cancer Survivors	A2
Continuing Medical Education	A5
Network Locator Map	A7



Cancer and blood disorder survivors enjoy the outdoors at Camp Rocky Ridge. Healthcare providers and others volunteer for the annual event, which allows kids to develop supportive friendships with other patients that suffer from similar illnesses.

Kids are Surviving Cancer... An Update for Physicians

By Lori Boucher, BSN, RN, Director of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, 'Specially for Children'

There is a community of young people in Central Texas who attack each day with a mission and strength and courage. The kids in this community range from one day old to 20 years old and share the common diagnosis of childhood cancer.

Incidence

Childhood cancer is relatively rare; approximately 14,000 cases will be diagnosed in the United States each year with 65 per year in Central Texas. While survival rates continue to improve, the journey is a roller coaster ride. Years ago the survival rate was dismal. "In the middle of the 20th century, prior to 1970, less than 10% of children diagnosed with cancer survived," says James C. Sharp, MD, 'Specially for Children.' Families lived with the

prospect of a dying child."

Through research and the efforts of physicians around the world and the Children's Oncology Group, cure rates have improved to nearly 80% on modern therapies. "Now we are able to support families in their battle against cancer while giving them hope in their journey towards a normal and productive life," continues Dr. Sharp.

With the new population of

children who have survived cancer, a new practice of medicine is evolving. The practice of monitoring long-term side effects in patients who were treated for childhood cancer is sweeping across the U.S.

Treatment Approaches

When children are diagnosed with cancer, the treatment modalities include radiation, surgery and chemotherapy. With



Dr. Sharon Lockhart (left) and Mary Lee, RN, (second from right) pose with a patient and mother. Helping patients' families deal with the issues of survivorship, such as navigating health insurance coverage and setting up follow-up care, is as much a part of a healthcare provider's job as recommending treatment modalities.



(From l-r) Pediatric hematologist/oncologist Dr. Sharon Lockhart serves as Clinical Research Director, Children's Blood and Cancer Program, Children's Hospital of Austin. Jamie Gender, RN, is a research nurse at 'Specially for Children.

the use of these modalities, we are able to force the cancer into remission with the hope of complete eradication. Over the years, physicians have discovered that the use of these treatments, while imperative to cure the cancer, may have lasting effects as the child grows into adulthood.

Radiation can effect the growth of the bones which were involved in the radiation field. Scoliosis can be found in young people who have received radiation to the chest, abdomen and spine. It can also increase the risk of breast cancer in patients who receive chest mantle radiation.

Chemotherapy can lend itself to multiple long-term side effects. Most of the long-term side effects are directly related to the type

and amount of chemotherapy that was given during the child's treatment. Children who were given medications like Adriamycin and Daunorubicin (both are a type of chemotherapy called Anthracyclines) are at risk for cardiomyopathy and can develop congestive heart failure in their 30s and 40s.

Both radiation and chemotherapy have been discovered to have the potential to affect the learning ability of a child. The type of cognitive effects that occur after chemotherapy and/or radiation may become apparent at any given period during the child's growth and development. Not all children receiving chemotherapy will experience cognitive effects from treatment.

Monitoring by the family as well as the teachers in the classroom will help detect any learning difficulties the patient may be having. Comprehensive testing can help identify weak or delayed areas and individualized help can be provided for the student.

Survival Issues

Many other issues arise with survival of childhood cancer. The health insurance industry becomes tricky to navigate and obtaining health insurance coverage can be difficult. The stress of "surviving" can be packed full of different emotions for the patient and their family. Fear of recurrence continues throughout the survivor's life as well as "survival guilt," having had survived the cancer experience when others did not.

There are thousands of children who have survived the treatment for childhood cancer. With this wonderful progression in survival, many children have gone on to make lives for themselves without the understanding that regular medical checkups are extremely important for their continued health.

There are several ways for the children of Central Texas who received treatment for a cancer diagnosis to receive follow-up care. The gold standard for follow-up care for children who have been treated for a cancer diagnosis is to attend a long-term follow-up clinic.

Late Effects Monitoring

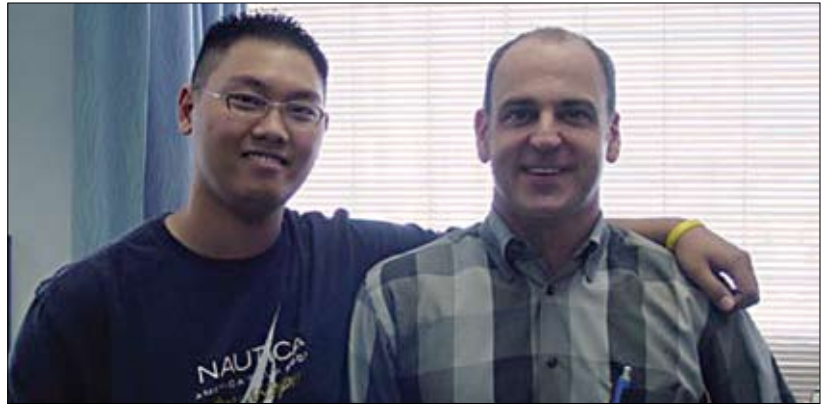
The children in the Central Texas area have the opportunity to be seen at the Survivor's Clinic located in Austin. The clinic is staffed with 'Specially for Children' physicians and their staff as well as supported by the Children's Hospital of Austin

[CONTINUED ON PAGE A4](#)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A3

and Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation. The clinic offers an interdisciplinary care approach and allows the patient to receive the information vital to the health of the patient. The patient receives visits from a team of healthcare providers including an oncology physician, the Blood and Cancer program coordinator, an oncology nurse, a social worker and a child life specialist. Issues specific to the needs of the patient are discussed. These needs can range from medical concerns such as fertility issues to social needs such as school issues or jobs. Opportunities to discuss healthy lifestyles are discussed as well as assistance transitioning from pediatric care to adult care.

An important document that each patient receives is an individualized cancer treatment history. This document outlines any chemotherapy, surgery or radiation the patient received. As the patient grows into adulthood, this document will help healthcare providers to understand which treatments



(Right) Dr. Don Wells, 'Specially for Children, with one of his patients. Thanks to modern therapies and devoted healthcare providers, children who survive cancer can lead full, productive lives.

were administered and to be aware of the possible long-term side effects that might occur. For primary healthcare providers who are caring for a patient who had previously been treated for childhood cancer, follow-up care guidelines are available on Curesearch.com,

the Children's Oncology Group Web site. The physicians and staff at 'Specially for Children Pediatric Hematology/Oncology are available to collaborate with and answer any questions primary care providers may have regarding cancer treatment and its long-term side effects.

For more information on childhood cancer, contact James Sharp, MD, 'Specially for Children, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, at (512) 324-8480. To access patient referral forms online, visit www.childrenshospital.com.



Several Children's Cancer Program patients and their siblings participated in the 2005 Ride for the Roses, sponsored by the Lance Armstrong Foundation.