Cancer Health 25: Sonia Ancoli-Israel, PhD

A pioneering researcher on a mission to help people affected by cancer sleep well

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The Cancer Health 25 is an annual list that honors individuals who have made a difference in the lives of people with cancer. This year's theme is quality of life. To see the full list, click here.

For nearly 30 years, Sonia Ancoli-Israel, PhD, studied sleep and how to improve it as well as fatigue and circadian rhythms in people undergoing cancer treatment. For people being treated for cancer, quality sleep can be elusive, yet sleep deprivation can impair how patients feel, recover and even respond to treatment.

Ancoli-Israel, 70, was a professor in the department of psychiatry at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, director of the Sleep Disorders Clinic at the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System and codirector of the Education Unit of the VA VISN 22 Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs). Her work focused primarily on women with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy.

Ancoli-Israel is internationally recognized for her expertise in sleep disorders, sleep and aging and

sleep medicine, a field that, compared with others, has received much less research attention. Her interests include the relationship between circadian rhythms and cancer and the use of light therapy to improve sleep and behavior in nursing home populations.

Ancoli-Israel, who is published regularly in psychiatric and medical journals, is the author of All I Want Is a Good Night's Sleep, a patient-friendly guide to sleeping better that discusses common problems associated with sleep (insomnia, circadian rhythms, sleep in children and sleep disordered breathing) and how to deal with them.

Her work has earned her such awards as the National Sleep Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007, the Sleep Research Society (SRS) Mary A. Carskadon Outstanding Educator Award, the 2012 Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine's Career Distinguished Achievement Award and the 2014 SRS Distinguished Scientist Award.

Now retired, Ancoli-Israel advises and mentors educators in the field of sleep medicine, encouraging new thinking and approaches.

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