Lung Cancer Awareness Month: A Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center Roundup

Progress in early screening and diagnostics for lung cancer, plus smoking cessation programs to help reduce health disparities

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As Lung Cancer Awareness Month begins in November, experts at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center remain committed to advancing early screening, helping people quit smoking and developing new ways to detect and treat lung cancer.

Lung cancer is the second most common adult cancer in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2023 in the U.S. there will be:

- 238,340 new cases of lung cancer (117,550 in men and 120,790 in women)
- 127,070 deaths from lung cancer (67,160 in men and 59,910 in women)

Please see below for Fred Hutch's recent lung cancer news and our lists of lung cancer researchers and lung cancer clinical providers.

Lung Cancer Screening

Don't forget the follow up after lung cancer screening

For the last 10 years, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force has advised that adults between the ages of 50 and 80 who have a 20 pack-year smoking history and currently smoke (or have quit within the past 15 years) should receive a low-dose computed tomography (CT) every year to check for lung cancer. But studies demonstrate that only 10% to 15% of people who are eligible for screening actually get screened. Recent work by cancer prevention researcher Matthew Triplette, MD, MPH, also raises concerns that many of those who do get screened have delayed follow-up after positive screening results. Triplette discusses how patient navigation can help people follow up in a video.

Smoking Cessation

Smoking cessation trial for American Indians and Alaska Natives funded
Led by behavioral psychologist Jonathan Bricker, PhD, a new five-year, $3.6 million grant from the National Cancer Institute will test the efficacy of digital smoking prevention smartphone apps. The grant will support a new nationwide study that Bricker said is aimed at "breaking down these challenges" and is specifically tailored for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Why it's so hard for Indigenous people to quit smoking

Fred Hutch launched a həliʔil program in 2018 to proactively engage the local American Indian and Alaska Native community to enhance access to cancer care. One part of the progam is to provide cultural consultation to medical providers, which helps address the topic of quitting smoking in a manner that acknowledges and respects cultural nuances. Nina McEachem, a patient of Eddie A. Marzbani, MD, is a testament to the need for programs like this as it helps break down barriers and further understanding about the cultural significance of tobacco use while supporting patients on their journey to quit smoking.

Lung Dancer Diagnostics

New protocols, precision approaches ahead for lung cancer

Viswam Nair, MD, MS, a pulmonologist and clinical researcher, is developing a less invasive way to molecularly profile lung cancer using bronchoalveolar lavage fluid. This is a test that samples the area around the tumor with essentially salt water. It is routinely performed for lung cancer patients in the clinic but currently is of low value to diagnose and profile lung cancer. Nair's work suggests that the lavage approach is a valuable alternative since it does not require tissue biopsy and could reveal important tumor markers to guide treatment.

Is it cancer? A combination non-invasive approach to determine if indeterminate pulmonary nodules are cancerous
Kristin Lastwika, PhD, studies interactions between the immune system and cancer cells. In particular, she examines immune proteins called autoantibodies, which are released by immune cells and recognize our own tissues, including tumors. Lastwika, an assistant professor in Fred Hutch's Translational Sciences and Therapeutics Division, uses a platform that enables her to isolate tumor-directed autoantibodies directly from cancer patients. She is working to turn these into new biomarker tests, imaging tools and cancer immunotherapies.

Lung cancer expert Dr. McGarry Houghton receives Satya and Rao Remala Family Endowed Chair
New funding for pulmonary physician-scientist McGarry Houghton, MD, will help support research for better early detection of lung cancer. Houghton, who oversees lung cancer research at Fred Hutch, has a background in noncancerous lung diseases and his research delves into how the human immune system responds to cancer. "As someone who sees patients, I'm very familiar with our clinical limitations when it comes to early detection and how much we need help there,"

Houghton said.

Clinical Care

For a fourth bout of cancer—of the lung this time—Art turned to proton therapy
Patient Art Chandler shares his lung cancer journey and what led him to Fred Hutch's proton therapy center for treatment. Due to his tumor's proximity to his heart, John Kang, MD, PhD, recommended proton therapy, a radiation option that more precisely targets tumors, to help minimize potential damage to his organs and healthy lung tissue.

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