Cancer screening based on family history can increase survival rates, but only if you know and tell

In January we introduced the term “social determinants,” the environmental and social factors which are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Although these factors can result in social, political, and economic conditions that promote conditions like poverty, slavery, segregation, and oppression, they can also continue to impact people throughout their lives and the quality of life. What we must understand is that unfavorable, people live healthier lives when they’re not the opposite is true. In Pittsburgh, health care can vary drastically depending on your ZIP Code.

For hundreds of years in this country, systemic racism has created poor health outcomes. While integration in healthcare has improved substantially in the U.S. in the last 50 years, access in our community still has a long way to go. As the American Cancer Society (ACS) reports, people of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to die from cancer than those with higher income and education levels. In the United States, people living in the lowest income quintiles are about 2.3 times more likely to die from lung cancer compared to those living in the highest income quintile.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identified cancer as the leading cause of preventable deaths, accounting for 25% of deaths from all causes. Cancer is a major public health problem as it has become a leading cause of death and disability in the United States. In 2020, an estimated 1.8 million people were diagnosed with cancer, and 600,000 people died from the disease. While there has been progress in reducing cancer-related death rates, significant disparities in cancer incidence, diagnosis, and treatment continue to exist across the nation, especially among racial and ethnic minorities, those with lower incomes, and those with less education. These disparities can be attributed to a variety of factors, including unequal access to healthcare services, barriers to care, and different patterns of risk factors for cancer.

As a result, the American Cancer Society (ACS) has identified the need for a comprehensive approach to cancer prevention and control that addresses the social determinants of health, such as education, income, and access to healthcare. The ACS recommends that individuals be encouraged to seek out opportunities for community organizational, and policy-level interventions to address these disparities.

In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of free clinics and health centers that provide cancer screening services, particularly for underserved populations. These centers often provide services such as mammograms, colonoscopies, and other cancer screenings, as well as information about the importance of regular cancer screening. However, despite these efforts, access to cancer screening remains a significant barrier for many individuals, especially those with low income or limited access to healthcare.

The Pittsburgh Cancer Institute is one such organization that offers free cancer screening services to those who qualify. The Institute is supported by various sources, including the government, foundations, and private donations. The Institute’s mission is to reduce cancer disparities and improve cancer outcomes for all people, with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.

The Institute’s screening programs include mammograms, colonoscopies, and other cancer screenings available to those who meet the eligibility criteria. In addition, the Institute provides educational programs to help individuals understand the importance of cancer screening and the steps they can take to reduce their risk of cancer.

The Institute also partners with other organizations and community groups to promote cancer prevention and control. The Institute works with a variety of stakeholders, including healthcare providers, community organizations, and government agencies, to address the social determinants of health that contribute to cancer disparities.

In conclusion, while there is progress being made in reducing cancer-related death rates, significant disparities in cancer incidence, diagnosis, and treatment continue to exist across the nation. The American Cancer Society and the Pittsburgh Cancer Institute are working to address these disparities through a comprehensive approach that addresses the social determinants of health and provides access to cancer screening services.

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