

Increased Cancer Risk Among the HIV-Infected Elderly in the United States

It has long been determined that people with HIV have a higher risk of a number of cancer types—namely prostate cancer, lung cancer, anal cancer, colorectal cancer, breast cancer, pancreatic cancer, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma—and that, in the general population, the elderly (aged 65 and over) have a higher cancer risk than their younger counterparts. Currently, only a small percentage of the current HIV population is older than 65, but, thanks to the advancements made in medicine over the past decades, the HIV population's life expectancy is higher than it has ever been. Unfortunately, this now means that there is an even greater risk for HIV-associated cancers to surface as this group ages, so a recent study published in February 2016 aimed to determine the combined cancer risk for HIV-infected elderly in the United States.

In the February study, nearly 500,000 HIV-infected elderly people were studied over a 5-year period after which about 10% of them developed cancer (with the most frequent diagnoses being lung, prostate, breast, and colorectal) and an overall noted cancer risk that was 50% greater in HIV-infected people than in the uninfected group. These results confirmed the increased risk of developing cancer due to the prolonged effects of HIV combined with aging and also supported the need for early detection and prevention for this age group.

We already understand that HIV-infected individuals have compromised immune systems, so it is extremely important to promote the benefits of educating them on cancer screening and smoking cessation. Doing so would greatly increase their chances for cancer prevention or successful treatment. Additionally, encouraging the HIV-infected population to follow a healthy diet of varied and nutrient-dense meals, like those provided by God's Love We Deliver, would also support viral suppression, further diminishing their risk of being diagnosed with cancer in their later years of life.

For a guide to free and low cost smoking cessation programs in NYC, please email nutrition@glwd.org