

Cancer Myths abound among adults in U.S., phone survey discovers

SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Washington- Nearly half of American adults in a new survey mistakenly believe that surgery can spread cancer, and more than one in four thinks that a cure for cancer exists but is being kept from the public by a profit-driven health care industry.

Results of the poll, done for the American Cancer Society, are being published in an upcoming issue of *Cancer*, the society's medical journal.

The national telephone survey, led by Dr. Ted Gansler, involved 957 adults with no history of cancer, and sought to assess American's understanding of the disease and its management.

The respondents were asked if five statements of "cancer myths" were true or false. Only 25 percent identified all the misconceptions as false.

Forty-one percent said surgical treatments actually spread cancer in the body; another 13 percent were unsure.

Twenty-seven percent said there is a cure for cancer available that's being held back by the health-care industry; another 14 percent were uncertain about this.

Nineteen percent mistakenly believed that pain medications are ineffective in treating cancer pain and 13 percent said they didn't know.

On the positive side, 89 percent disagreed with the claim that all you need to beat cancer is a positive attitude," and 87 percent disagreed with the statement that "cancer is something that cannot be effectively treated."

People who were 65 years of age or older, of nonwhite race, residents of the South, or who identified themselves as not having much understanding of cancer were more likely to subscribe to more of the cancer myths.

Dr. Gansler said the findings are troubling given the advances in treatment of cancer and survival rates for the most common forms of the disease over the past three decades.

"These results indicate that public and patient education interventions are most urgently needed in cancer centers, medical practices, and other community organizations." The researcher said.

He noted this was particularly the case with those serving people from the demographic groups shown to be least well informed.