Cancer death rate continues steady drop

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Steady reductions in smoking combined with advances in cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment have resulted in a 23% drop in the cancer death rate since its peak in 1991. The drop translates to more than 1.7 million cancer deaths averted through 2012. The findings are included in *Cancer Statistics*, 2016, the American Cancer Society's latest annual report on cancer incidence, mortality, and survival. It is published early online in *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.

Every year, the American Cancer Society estimates new cancer cases and deaths in the U.S. for the current year and compiles the most recent data on cancer incidence, mortality, and survival. The report estimates there will be 1,685,210 new cancer cases and 595,690 cancer deaths in the United States in 2016.

Overall cancer incidence is stable in women and declining by 3.1% per year in men (from 2009-2012), with one-half of the drop in men due to recent rapid declines in prostate cancer diagnoses as PSA testing decreases.

Cancer mortality continues to decline; over the past decade of data, the rate dropped by 1.8% per year in men and 1.4% per year in women. The decline in cancer death rates over the past two decades is driven by continued decreases in death rates for the four major cancer sites: lung, breast, prostate, and colon/rectum.

Death rates for female breast cancer have declined 36% from peak rates in 1989, while deaths from prostate and colorectal cancers have each dropped about 50% from their peak, a result of improvements in early detection and treatment. Lung cancer death rates declined 38% between 1990 and 2012 among males and 13% between 2002 and 2012 among females due to reduced tobacco use.

The report also features an analysis of leading causes of death by state and finds that, even as cancer remains the second leading cause of death nationwide, steep drops in deaths from heart disease have made cancer the leading cause of death in 21 states: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. In addition, cancer is the leading cause of death among adults ages 40 to 79, and among both Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders (APIs), who together make up one-quarter of the U.S. population. Heart disease remains the top cause of death overall in the United States. In 2012, there were 599,711 (24%) deaths from heart disease, compared to 582,623 (23%) deaths from cancer.

"We're gratified to see cancer death rates continuing to drop. But the fact that cancer is nonetheless becoming the top cause of death in many populations is a strong reminder that the fight is not over," said Otis W. Brawley, M.D., chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. "Cancer is in fact a group of more than 100 diseases, some amenable to treatment; some stubbornly resistant. So while the average American's chances of dying from the disease are significantly lower now than they have been for previous generations, it continues to be all-too-often the reason for shortened lives, and too much pain and suffering."

More information: Cancer Statistics 2016, *Cancer J Clin* 2016; doi:10. 3322/caac.21332

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