

## **Adult cancer survivors are at risk for psychological distress**

A national interview study asked participants if they had ever been diagnosed with cancer as an adult, and also assessed whether they had any serious psychological distress. Researchers examined a group of 4636 participants who had been diagnosed with cancer more than 5 years before, and compared their answers with 122,220 participants who had never been diagnosed with cancer. They found that 5.6% of cancer survivors had reported severe psychological distress in the 30 days preceding their interviews, while only 3.0 % of those without cancer had reported distress – a significant difference. Further, 9% of the cancer survivors and 6% of those without cancer had seen a mental health professional during the last year. A third of survivors who reported severe psychological distress had seen mental health professionals – but 18% said they could not afford mental health care in the last year. Cancer survivors who were younger (average age at interview was 66 years), unmarried, had less than a high school education, had more other illnesses or who had difficulty performing their daily activities were most at risk for severe psychological distress. Having a history of cancer can affect life in many ways that could lead to distress. Besides affecting physical health in many ways, cancer can affect social adaptation, job opportunities and insurance coverage. All of these can lead to psychological difficulties. Cancer survivors should take steps to access mental health professionals if they are feeling distressed.

Hoffman KE et al. Psychological distress in long-term survivors of adult-onset cancer: results from a national survey. *Arch Intern Med.* 2009 Jul 27;169(14):1274-81.

**Nano:** Adults who have had cancer for more than 5 years are more likely than others to experience severe psychological distress and consult mental health professionals, especially those who are younger, unmarried or have difficulty with daily activities.