

Thyroid Cancer

Thyroid cancer is the fastest growing cancer among both men and women, and with September being Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month, survivors and others are urging all to "Find it Early." Estimates are that more than 52,000 people will be newly diagnosed with thyroid cancer this year in the United States alone, and more than 200,000 throughout the world. In the United States, more than 3,200 are expected to die from the disease. Thyroid cancer affects people of all ages, from infants to senior citizens. It differs from many other cancers in that it is increasing in incidence. However, like most other cancers, thyroid cancer is usually treatable when detected early.

As Tracy Ramsey, Family Nurse Practitioner at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital puts it: "Thyroid cancer is very treatable." While thyroid cancer appears to be occurring with more frequency within the general population, that doesn't seem to be true in Lawrence County, according to Ramsey. "I don't feel that thyroid cancer has become a trend in Lawrence County," she said. "People are getting more education and are more aware of signs and symptoms." Treatment for the disease depends upon the severity, according to Ramsey. There are multiple ways to go about it. "Treatment could consist of the removal of the thyroid," she said. "Or it could consist of chemotherapy, radiation or just medications."

ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association, Inc., sponsors Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month in nearly 100 countries throughout the world during September. The goal from this international grassroots effort is to raise awareness of the importance of early detection, treatment and lifelong monitoring, as well as to inform the public about the disease and the support services and resources that are available and emphasize the need for more research. ThyCa encourages people to ask for a neck check each time they visit a doctor. Signs to discuss with the provider include a lump or fullness in the neck, lymph node swelling, difficulty breathing or swallowing or voice changes.

Health officials note that doing a neck check can be as simple as touching the neck and watching the patient swallow. This can be done very quickly and won't cause any delays for the medical office, but that few seconds could make the difference when it comes to diagnosing thyroid cancer. This year marks the 19th annual Thyroid cancer event. What started as a week in 2000 expanded to the current Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month in 2003.

Thyroid cancer facts

- The reasons are unclear, but women are three times more likely to develop thyroid cancer than men. Most women are diagnosed with thyroid cancer in their 40s or 50s.
- Signs of thyroid cancer include lumps, swelling or pain in the front of the neck, persistent hoarseness or voice changes, difficulty swallowing and a persistent cough not due to a cold.
- There are four stages of thyroid cancer, with Stage IV being the most advanced.
- Treatment options depend on the location of the tumor and other factors. Some treatment options include chemotherapy, radioiodine therapy, radiation therapy and surgery.
- The death rate from thyroid cancer has remained relatively stable and low throughout the years, when compared to most other cancers. Approximately 67 percent of thyroid cancer diagnoses occur in people younger than 55, while approximately two percent of diagnoses occur in children and teens.