

Call for research into needs of cancer survivors

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Around one in three US cancer survivors have unmet physical, psychological and social needs decades after their treatment finished, according to new research.

As more people are diagnosed with cancer across the Western world, experts said the results highlight the need for further focus on understanding the needs of [cancer survivors](#).

"Survivors of cancer can face many different problems, depending on what type of cancer and treatment they had," said Martin Ledwick, Cancer Research UK's head information nurse.

"Side effects can range from general issues like [chronic fatigue](#) to more specific problems like changes in sexual function caused by radiotherapy to the [pelvic area](#). Emotional effects like anxiety about recurrence or issues related to facing one's mortality are also common."

The study published in the journal *Cancer*, surveyed 1,514 people between the ages of 24 and 97 asking them an open-ended question about what needs were not being met to their satisfaction.

Physical issues such as pain, incontinence or sexual dysfunction, were at the top of the list of unmet needs, affecting more than one in three survivors (38 per cent). These were closely followed by financial issues (20 per cent) and needs relating to maintaining independence (16 per cent).

Anxiety about cancer coming back was also a common theme expressed by survivors, regardless of the type of cancer they had or how many years it had been since they had cancer.

While the study was conducted in America, the UK faces a similar problem.

In the UK half the people who get cancer will now survive for more than 10 years and this number is projected to increase as the UK population's average age rises.

While there are some specialised clinics that deal with long-term side effects "they are still few and far between," said Ledwick.

"As survival rates improve, more people are likely to be living with the residual impact of having had cancer," he continued.

Ledwick was quick to add that many people do survive cancer with few or no long-term problems.

But in the meantime, things like support groups and online communities can provide help for some of the unmet needs.

Ledwick said more research was needed to properly understand the scale and variety of the problems [cancer survivors](#) will face and to know what interventions are likely to be most helpful.

More information: Burg, MA. et al. "Current unmet needs of cancer survivors: Analysis of open-ended responses to the American Cancer Society Study of Cancer Survivors II," *Cancer*, DOI: 10.1002/cncr.28951

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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