

Study finds that more than one-third of patients with metastatic cancer continue to work

December 21 2015

A new analysis indicates that many patients continue working after being diagnosed with metastatic cancer, but a heavy burden of symptoms may prevent them from doing so. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study illustrates the need to treat difficult symptoms so that patients can maintain their employment.

Improved treatments have helped to prolong the lives of [patients](#) with metastatic cancer. Because individuals diagnosed with metastatic cancer may wish to continue to work, understanding how their illness affects their employment may help patients make adjustments.

A team led by Amye Tevaarwerk, MD, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, analyzed the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group's "Symptom Outcomes and Practice Patterns (SOAPP)" study to investigate which factors are associated with employment changes among patients with metastatic cancer. Among the 668 patients in the analysis, 236 (35 percent) worked full- or part-time while 302 (45 percent) stopped working due to illness. Overall, 58 percent reported some change in employment due to illness.

After comparing patients who were stably working with patients who were no longer working, the researchers found that one of the most significant factors associated with no longer working was a high burden

of symptoms. Better performance status and non-Hispanic White ethnicity/race were associated with continuing to work despite a metastatic cancer diagnosis. Surprisingly, the type of cancer treatment, type of cancer, and time since diagnosis did not seem to affect [employment](#).

"For patients with [metastatic cancer](#), a great deal of attention is focused on the events surrounding initial diagnosis of disease and the issues surrounding the end-of-life; however, between cancer recurrence and the end-of-life, these patients are living their lives day-to-day and there are a number of unique survivorship issues during this time that have been overlooked by researchers," said Dr. Tevaarwerk. "Based on our data, we expect roughly one-third of metastatic patients will continue to try and work. Efforts to control symptoms may enable more patients to achieve this particular goal, and further research is needed to help us understand what other resources would benefit metastatic patients continuing to work."

More information: "Working after a metastatic cancer diagnosis: factors affecting employment in the metastatic setting from ECOG's Symptom Outcomes and Practice Patterns (SOAPP) study. Amye Tevaarwerk, Ju-Whei Lee, Abigail Terhaar, Mary Sesto, Mary Lou Smith, Charles Cleeland, and Michael Fisch. *Cancer*; Published Online: December 21, 2015 [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.29656](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.29656)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Study finds that more than one-third of patients with metastatic cancer continue to work (2015, December 21) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-one-third-patients-metastatic-cancer.html>

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