

Understanding cancer worries could break down barriers to seeking help

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Recognising the reasons people worry about a potential cancer diagnosis could help ease concern and encourage people with possible cancer symptoms to see their doctor earlier, according to research presented at the NCRI Cancer Conference.

Researchers based at University College London found that 62 per cent of people in the UK worry about their risk of getting [cancer](#). But until now, little was known about what it is about cancer that worries them. So the researchers asked over 2,000 people how worried they were about various aspects of cancer.

Their findings show that about two thirds worry about the emotional impact of a [cancer diagnosis](#) and dying from cancer. This was closely followed by worries about cancer treatments, which were shared by 50 per cent of people. Worries about the social consequences of a cancer diagnosis were less pronounced, with only about 25 per cent of people in the UK worrying about what a diagnosis of cancer would mean for their important relationships.

The researchers also looked at which groups of the population were more worried. They found that women and younger people were more likely to worry about cancer in general, while ethnic minorities in the UK were more likely to specifically worry about the social consequences of a cancer diagnosis.

The team interviewed more than 2,000 adults aged between 18 and 70

and asked questions on 12 different potential areas of concern. These included worry about being diagnosed with cancer, dying from cancer, cancer treatments, financial problems and the effect the disease could have on relationships.

Charlotte Vrinten, lead author based at University College London, said: "We know that fear of cancer can put some people off seeking help for possible cancer symptoms. This study highlights the number of people who have concerns about cancer, and the variety of concerns they may have.

"Everyone reacts differently to worry. For some, it can encourage them to go to their doctor, but it puts other people off. We now need to find out why worry motivates people differently so that we can ease the fears of those who are put off seeing their doctor, because undue fear of cancer may cost people their lives. It's also important to remember that cancer treatments and survival are improving and a cancer diagnosis doesn't have to be dreaded like it used to be."

Martin Ledwick, Cancer Research UK's head nurse said: "We've all had times when we've wondered whether to see a GP, but getting unusual or persistent changes checked out is really important. Research that helps uncover why some people worry about cancer is vital because it helps us recognise those fears and understand how we can start to address them.

"Doctors are there to help spot cancer symptoms early when treatment is more likely to be successful. Delaying a visit could save up bigger problems for later. So if you've noticed anything that isn't normal for you, make an appointment to see your doctor. Or you can phone our cancer information nurses on 0808 800 4040 to discuss any concerns."

Dr Karen Kennedy, NCRI Director, said: "This work highlights the importance of research to understand people's concerns about cancer and

the worries they experience. By working in collaboration and listening to the views of people affected by cancer, and who may be affected in future, we can find ways to break down the barriers that people face when thinking about seeking advice from their doctor or attending screening appointments."

More information: C.Vrinten et al., "What is it about cancer that worries people? A population-based survey of adults in England", presented at the NCRI Cancer Conference.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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