

New study finds childhood cancer survivors commonly stay at jobs to keep health insurance

October 19 2017

The results of a national cancer survey find a significant number of childhood cancer survivors are worried about keeping their health insurance, to the point of letting it affect their career decisions. The findings were published today in *JAMA Oncology*.

Anne Kirchhoff, PhD, investigator at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) at the University of Utah and assistant professor of pediatrics, led the study. Her goal was to examine the prevalence of job lock in full-time, employed childhood [cancer survivors](#). Job lock is when an employee stays at a job in order to keep work-related [health insurance](#).

The study found 23 percent of [childhood cancer survivors](#) reported job lock, compared to just under 17 percent of the survivors' siblings who never had cancer.

"Even with protections and expansions of [insurance coverage](#) in the U.S., this study proves there is still quite a bit of worry about insurance," says Kirchhoff, "and it's affecting how people make decisions from a job standpoint. Employer-based insurance coverage is the most common way people get insurance in the U.S. If someone gets stuck in a certain job because they want to keep their insurance coverage, that could really affect their earning power across a lifetime. It could potentially stymie their ability to start a new company or take on a job that would allow them to have more career or income growth, all because of health

insurance worries."

The study found female survivors and survivors with [chronic health conditions](#) were more likely to report job lock. Researchers also determined survivors who had a history of problems paying medical bills and those with past health insurance denials were more likely to report feeling like they couldn't change [jobs](#) because of insurance worries.

Kirchhoff says, "This information gives us a feel for high-risk groups of survivors who may need more information about insurance. Many people experience a gap in education and literacy around insurance, and it's important for people to understand their options - even those who are employed and consistently had access to insurance through work. We want to know what their concerns are so we can help patients and survivors. Getting [health care](#) should not be a worry for cancer survivors."

The study analyzed 394 pediatric cancer survivors from pediatric oncology institutions across the U.S., along with 128 of their siblings. All of the participants worked 35 hours or more per week. Eighty-eight percent of them had employer-sponsored health insurance. Only four percent of survivors (and just over six percent of siblings) were uninsured.

The cancer survivors were treated for cancer between birth and age 20, and all of the participants ranged in age at the time of the survey from their 20s to early 60s. They were asked to fill out surveys analyzing their insurance and work concerns.

Childhood cancer survivors were chosen to study because their life experiences are unique. Childhood cancer patients have seen tremendous growth in outcomes and survival over the years. But many times their strong treatments as children can lead to health problems as they get

older. Certain chemotherapies can increase a patient's risk of chronic health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, down the road. Treatments can cause infertility, and second cancers and lung issues can appear in some patients. About a third of pediatric survivors in this survey reported a severe, disabling or life-threatening chronic condition. The study showed the patients' past [cancer](#) diagnosis can often shape their insurance and health care decisions later in life.

"Survivors have been through a lot when they were younger and understand the importance of making sure they can get health care when they need it," explains Kirchhoff. "I think a lot of them also saw what their parents and families went through in terms of the financial stress and burden of dealing with a health crisis. So they're just primed to understand the importance of [health insurance](#)."

Provided by University of Utah

Citation: New study finds childhood cancer survivors commonly stay at jobs to keep health insurance (2017, October 19) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-childhood-cancer-survivors-commonly-jobs.html>

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