

Palliative care reduces odds of suicide in lung cancer patients

June 23 2018



(HealthDay)—Patients with advanced lung cancer have increased

incidence of suicide, which is reduced in association with receipt of palliative care, according to a study which was presented recently at the annual meeting of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, held from April 28 to May 1 in San Diego.

Donald R. Sullivan, M.D., from the Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, and colleagues examined advanced stage lung cancer [patients](#) in the Veteran Affairs (VA) Healthcare System to estimate the incidence of suicide. The correlation between [palliative care](#) and suicide as cause of death was also examined.

The researchers found that 87 percent of the 20,900 lung cancer patients had lung cancer as the cause of death. Other cancers, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were other common causes of death. Thirty deaths were due to suicide, with an overall rate of suicide of 200/100,000 patient years. Compared with the overall age, sex, and year adjusted rate of suicide among veterans who use VA health care, this rate represented a five-fold increase (37.5/100,000 patient years). Only 20 percent of the patients who died by suicide had a palliative care encounter, compared with 57 percent among lung cancer patients whose cause of death was not suicide. A palliative care encounter correlated with reduced odds of death from suicide (odds ratio, 0.18).

"The risk of [suicide](#) is underappreciated among cancer patients, especially those with advanced stage disease," Sullivan said in a statement. "This study shows another potential benefit of palliative care among [lung cancer patients](#)."

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Citation: Palliative care reduces odds of suicide in lung cancer patients (2018, June 23) retrieved 4 May 2024 from

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