

Many mistakenly believe alternative therapies can cure cancer

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(HealthDay)—Despite evidence to the contrary, four in 10 Americans

believe alternative therapies can cure cancer, a new survey finds.

Research shows that [cancer](#) death rates are much higher among [patients](#) who use only alternative therapies than among those who receive standard cancer treatments, according to the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

The group's second annual National Cancer Opinion Survey also found that many Americans oppose limiting [cancer patients](#)' access to opioid painkillers (such as OxyContin) and support the use of [medical marijuana](#) by cancer patients.

The high cost of cancer also emerged as a major concern among Americans.

"This survey serves as a barometer of the American people's views on important cancer-related issues," said ASCO President Dr. Monica Bertagnolli.

"It's revealed a number of critical areas we urgently need to address—from correcting widespread misinformation about cancer treatments, to ensuring patients have access to the pain medication they need, to alleviating the financial distress both patients and their loved ones experience too frequently," Bertagnolli said in a society news release.

The online survey, conducted in July and August, included almost 4,900 U.S. adults aged 18 and older. About 1,000 have or have had cancer.

The survey found that 39 percent of respondents—including a high number of cancer patients and family caregivers—believe cancer can be cured using just alternative therapies, such as enzyme and oxygen [therapy](#), diet, vitamins and minerals.

According to ASCO Chief Medical Officer Dr. Richard Schilsky, "There's no question that evidence-based cancer therapy is necessary to effectively treat the disease."

He added: "The vast majority of alternative therapies either haven't been rigorously studied or haven't been found to benefit patients. When patients are making critical decisions about which cancer treatments to undergo, it is always best to follow the evidence from well-designed research studies."

Younger people—between 18 and 53—were more likely to put their faith in [alternative therapies](#), the survey revealed.

A recent study in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* underscored the danger of such thinking: The death rate from common cancers for people who receive only alternative medicine treatments is 2.5 times higher than for patients who receive standard treatments, such as surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy and hormone-based therapies.

Other findings from the ASCO [survey](#):

- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents said new regulations that make prescription opioids harder to obtain should not apply to cancer patients.
- Forty percent of cancer patients who have used opioids in the past 12 months to manage pain or other symptoms have had trouble obtaining the medications.
- More than eight out of 10 respondents support use of medical marijuana by cancer patients. But 48 percent of cancer patients who have used medical marijuana in the past 12 months said they had trouble obtaining it.

- If diagnosed with cancer, 57 percent said their chief concern would be the financial impact on their families or the cost of treatment. Dying or concerns about cancer-related pain and suffering would be the key worry for a smaller percentage (54 percent each).

"Patients are right to be concerned about the financial impact of a cancer diagnosis on their families. It's clear that high treatment costs are taking a serious toll not only on patients, but also on the people who care for them," Schilsky said.

"If a family member has been diagnosed with cancer, the sole focus should be helping them get well," Schilsky said. "Instead, Americans are worrying about affording treatment, and in many cases, they're making serious personal sacrifices to help pay for their loved ones' care."

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [cancer treatment](#).

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