

THE UNCOMMON TASK OF TREATING CHILDREN WITH CANCER

➔ An estimated 13,000 children, newborn to age 18, are diagnosed with cancer each year in the United States. About 100 of those cases occur in the Las Vegas area. ¶ While there are few events as upsetting and jarring as discovering a child has cancer, ongoing research and dedicated children's cancer treatment facilities continue to improve the quality of care available to kids. ¶ "Childhood cancers are usually very different from adult cancers and need to be treated as such," said Dr. Alan Ikeda, MD, a pediatric hematologist and oncologist at Sunrise Children's Hospital and Children's Specialty Center of Nevada.

TYPES OF CHILDHOOD CANCERS

Pediatric cancers are divided into three major groups. Approximately one-third are leukemia or lymphomas, one-third are brain tumors, and one-third are solid tumors (tumors found within the body that do not contain cysts or liquid). Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia is the most common overall.

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

One of the primary differences between childhood cancer and adult cancer is the cause. "Adult cancer's are often linked to being exposed to environmental factors, whereas childhood cancer is not," Ikeda said. Many childhood cancers are caused by gene mutations and occasionally spurred by genetic conditions. Parents cannot cause or prevent childhood cancer and cannot blame themselves should their child become ill.

The cancers found in children often are uncommon in adults.

CARE FOR ALL
The Children's Specialty Center of Nevada is a branch of Cure 4 The Kids Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to treating children with cancer and other complex medical conditions. Based in Las Vegas, the program guarantees no child will be denied care at the facility for the inability to pay. If needed, the program also covers follow-up care for the child into adulthood. For more information or to donate, visit cure4thekids.org.



TREATMENT

"Children's cancers are treated similarly as adult cancers, using multimodality techniques such as surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, depending on the individual patient's needs," Ikeda said. "However, it's very important that children are treated in dedicated facilities with a pediatric oncologist team." Psychological and emotional support also is a critical component of care when treating children.

LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP

Most patients who survive childhood cancer will not experience a recurrence as an adult. However, in some cases, treatment can make patients more vulnerable to other cancers later in life. "Long-term follow-up care is an integral part of the process for any cancer patient and is especially necessary for child survivors," Ikeda said. Follow-up care typically involves regular checkups and blood work, and should continue for the rest of the patient's life.

Thirty percent of children with cancer have leukemia, while brain and nervous system tumors and solid tumors trail closely behind.



OUTCOMES

Survival rates for most childhood cancers are high, and with dedicated, concentrated research, rates continue to improve. Five-year survival rates for acute leukemia are in the 90 percent range, while brain and nervous system tumors have a 72 percent survival rate. Survival rates are not as high for some rare cancers, but that often is attributed to the lack of general research directed toward those cases.

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