

CHILDHOOD CANCER - September 2020

Although February is Lions' Childhood Cancer Month, the U.S., Canada and many countries around the world recognize **September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month**. In the 20 years I've been connected to pediatric cancer issues, it's been encouraging to see a dramatic increase in awareness of and attention to childhood cancer at the local and national levels. **The color gold represents childhood cancer, because gold is a precious metal and children are our most precious treasure. Thus, the gold ribbon is the international symbol of childhood cancer.** I would like to encourage you to wear a gold ribbon especially during September. They are easy to make with fabric or can be purchased online on many sites.

When viewing childhood cancer statistics, you might notice some discrepancies among sources. Some sources focus on ages 0 to 14, while others include ages 15-19, which is what I'm most accustomed to. In bringing myself up to date on Canadian childhood cancer facts, I found those to be very similar to U.S. data on a per capita basis.

In Canada, an average of 3.5 kids and adolescents are diagnosed with cancer every day, 43 every day in the U.S. In both countries, cancer is the #1 cause of death by disease for children and adolescents. Some of the cancers that develop in children are rarely seen in older individuals, and childhood cancers tend to be more aggressive and diagnosed at a later stage. Causes of most childhood cancers are not known. Less than 10% of all cancers in children are caused by an inherited mutation.

Thankfully, survival rates have improved dramatically in the last 50 years. Overall, about 80% of kids with cancer survive at least 5 years, but survival rates vary greatly depending on the type of cancer. This can range from 99% for retinoblastoma to 95% for some kinds of leukemia to 1% for DIPG, a type of brain tumor. One in five of those 5-year survivors will die prematurely due to the original cancer, a secondary cancer or the effects of treatments. In the U.S., an average of 5 kids loses the battle every day.

Seems very bleak, but what can we do? Support and advocate for more money spent on research specifically for pediatric cancer. Kids aren't just "little adults" - their fast-growing bodies react differently to treatments, and they often have cancers that are rarely seen in adults.

One more immediate action many of us can take is to donate blood on a regular basis. Blood donations directly impact a child's survivability, especially those with blood cancers (of course adults too). When my daughter was in treatment for Acute Myeloid Leukemia, she had over 200 transfusions of either whole blood or platelets, without which she wouldn't have survived as long as she did. I'm very grateful to all those wonderful donors who made that possible. I realize that during this pandemic, many won't feel safe donating blood. Honestly, it took me a while to get up the nerve, but it made me feel good to finally do it. I certainly understand that many aren't able to donate blood due to their own health issues, but for those who can, please do!

Lion Connie Hill-Bunch
Childhood Cancer Chair
chillbunch@comcast.net
(509) 939-0725

