

High prevalence of undertreated cardiovascular disease in patients diagnosed with cancer

Heart disease and cancer are the most common causes of death in the United States. They often have the same risk factors (for example, smoking, advancing age, obesity). Heart disease can worsen outcomes after cancer therapy and cancer therapy can result in heart disease. This tight relationship has led to the emergence of multidisciplinary approach to patients with cancer and heart disease (termed oncocardiology). We hypothesized that different manifestations of heart disease and vessel disease are very common in patients diagnosed with cancer and may be undertreated.

Using a very large clinical database of 1/8th of the US population, we identified patients with most common cancers and identified the presence of patients with heart and vessel diseases. Overall, about a third to half of patients had heart disease: 33% of patients with leukemia and lymphoma, 43% of patients with lung cancers, 17% of patients with breast cancers, 26% of patients with colon cancers, 35% of patients with renal cancers, and 26% of patients with head and neck cancers.

The most common manifestations were peripheral artery disease, coronary artery disease and cerebrovascular diseases being the most common. Despite these high percentages, only about a half of these patients were on medicines to treat their heart disease and only about a half were referred to heart specialists.

This study concludes that it is essential that patients with cancers are screened and treated for heart disease. Referrals to heart specialists is important to identify the risk and treat underlying heart conditions.

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