

## **Script – Print – The Pipeline between Smoking and Bladder Cancer**

### **May is National Bladder Cancer Awareness Month**

There are many reasons why smoking is harmful to your health. The risk of getting bladder cancer is high on that list.

There are about 80,000 new cases of bladder cancer diagnosed each year in the United States, and approximately 17,000 deaths. Bladder cancer, which affects the lining of the bladder, is the ninth most common malignancy in the world and that number continues to rise.

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"Typically it's found in older adults," says Dr. Iftexhar Ahmad, a radiation oncologist for OSF HealthCare. "Over the age of 55 is the age we see bladder cancer. Men are predominately more affected than women. Part of it has to do with the fact that smoking has such a high correlation with bladder cancer; statistically men smoke more than women in this country."

Factors that may increase bladder cancer risk include: exposure to certain chemicals, chronic bladder inflammation and personal or family history of cancer. But smoking is the greatest concern. Smokers are three times more likely to get bladder cancer than non-smokers. Smoking cigarettes, cigars or pipes cause dangerous chemicals to accumulate in the urine.

"The number one risk factor for bladder cancer by far is smoking," says Dr. Ahmad. "Over 90% of bladder cancer cases you can usually find heavy smoking or a history of heavy smoking. There aren't any other specific risk factors to point out or something you can avoid. It's really smoking that one would need to stop."

Blood in the urine is the most common symptom of bladder cancer. Other symptoms include frequent urination, pain while urinating and lower back pain.

If cancer is the diagnosis, surgery is the mainstay but in many cases chemotherapy and radiation are also utilized. There have been many advances when it comes to surgically treating bladder cancer, many of which are performed with a minimally invasive robot. Immunotherapy is a newer treatment which is now being used in bladder cancer. Immunotherapy works by stimulating the body's own immune system to remove cancerous cells.

"The prognosis for bladder cancer as with most other cancers just depends on the stage, meaning how soon it was found," says Dr. Ahmad. "Certainly if it was non-invasive has a very good prognosis and even if it becomes muscle invasive – if there's no positive lymph nodes – then again good prognosis. But once the cancer moves, the chance of cure does go down."

According to Dr. Ahmad, there are steps people can take to help prevent bladder cancer, including maintaining a healthy diet, exercising, drinking proper amounts of water and, of course, not smoking.

"The main take-home message is to quit smoking," he says. "Not only does that reduce your risk of bladder cancer, but it also reduces your risk of many other cancers as well as lung problems in general."

Dr. Ahmad adds that it's never too late to quit. Every cigarette, he says, does some damage to your body. Even quitting after 40 years of smoking can still help you overall.

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