

Pancreatic Cancer: The Need for More Research

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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It's been nearly ten years since actor Patrick Swayze died from pancreatic cancer at the age of 57, 20 months after his diagnosis.

And now comes word that Jeopardy! host Alex Trebek has been diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer at 78. He's vowing to aggressively fight the disease.

Despite the high profile celebrities that bring attention to it, fewer than 200,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer each year. And the sad reality is, it is the third-leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

Trebek's case is what is often seen.

SOT Dr. Chandler Wilfong – OSF HealthCare Surgeon

(More than 70% of patients will be diagnosed at a later age in life - 65 years or older. And unfortunately 85% of patients will have advanced disease when they're diagnosed :14)

Dr. Chandler Wilfong with Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare specializes in Hepatopancreaticobiliary Surgery which focuses on the liver, pancreas, and biliary system.

Dr. Chandler says risk factors for developing pancreatic cancer include long-standing diabetes, smoking, excessive alcohol intake, with potential links to heredity.

He says the lack of an effective screening tool makes it hard to diagnose before the cancer reaches advanced stages.

SOT Dr. Chandler Wilfong – OSF HealthCare Surgeon

(Unfortunately due to the location of the pancreas it does not present with symptoms in early disease. The symptoms are nonspecific a lot of times, maybe some vague abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss, fatigue and these are hard to correlate with a diagnosis of cancer :20)

Dr. Chandler says the biggest hope for fighting pancreatic cancer is on-going research and clinical trials to improve diagnosis and chemotherapy treatments.

He adds that a healthy lifestyle is the best prevention, as well as seeing a physician early for any unexplained symptoms.

Learn more about pancreatic cancer and treatment options [here](#).