

Script – Print – The Story about Myeloma

March is National Multiple Myeloma Awareness Month

Multiple myeloma is a relatively uncommon cancer. In 2021, the American Cancer Society estimates that nearly 35,000 new cases will be diagnosed in the U.S. Of those, about 12,500 deaths will occur. While uncommon, multiple myeloma is still a cancer that warrants plenty of attention. March is National Multiple Myeloma Awareness Month.

“Multiple Myeloma is a blood cancer and it affects the plasma cells, which is a type of white blood cell so it basically lowers someone’s ability to fight an infection,” said Katie McGrail, Physician Assistant, OSF HealthCare. “Even though it’s the second most common blood cancer, it’s actually only one to two percent of blood cancers diagnosed yearly.”

With multiple myeloma, cancerous plasma cells collect in the bone marrow, leaving little room for healthy blood cells. Rather than produce useful antibodies, the cancer cells produce abnormal proteins that can cause problems

There are several risk factors when it comes to multiple myeloma. People under 45 are rarely diagnosed, men are more likely than women to get it and African Americans are more prone to get multiple myeloma.

“Some increased risk factors for myeloma would be exposure to Agent Orange, increased body mass, if you’re an African American that increases your risk, if you’re a male it increases your risk, if you’ve been diagnosed with monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance you’re at an increased risk of that turning into multiple myeloma down the road, as well as patients who have a first degree relative with multiple myeloma, there’s actually a 3.7 fold increase for them to develop it in their life,” said Katie McGrail, Physician Assistant, OSF HealthCare.

Symptoms of multiple myeloma vary. In fact, there may be no symptoms early on in the disease. But if you are experiencing nausea, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss or frequent infections, some investigation might be in order.

“Fatigue, weakness, new bone pain, things that you can’t really explain to why you’re feeling like this would be something to see your doctor about,” said Katie McGrail, Physician Assistant, OSF HealthCare.

Treatment depends on how advanced the cancer is and whether there are any symptoms. If there are symptoms, treatment may include chemotherapy, stem cell transplantation, radiation, or targeted therapy, which uses drugs to attack specific cancer cells with minimal damage to healthy cells. If there are no symptoms, treatment may not be needed right away.

“There’s no cure for it, unfortunately, but we’ve made leaps and bounds as far as treatment options and having patients living longer,” said Katie McGrail, Physician Assistant, OSF

HealthCare. "It's something, especially during a pandemic, if you really aren't feeling well you need to see your doctor because it's back to where it's safe to come to hospitals and see your physician. It's something you don't want to put off, because the longer you put off multiple myeloma you might have more bone lesions and more fractures in the future and that can cause significant pain and other issues."

For more information about cancer services, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).