

A Look at Pancreatic Cancer

The pancreas is a small spongy organ that lies under the curvature of the stomach and deep within the abdomen. The pancreas is complicated but it does two main things: produces enzymes that are useful for the digestion of food AND secretes hormones (like insulin and glucagon) that, among other actions, help maintain and regulate body sugar levels.

- In the developed world, cancer is the second most common cause of death (behind heart disease).
- Pancreatic cancer is the number **four** cause of death from cancer (behind lung, colorectal and breast).
- Pancreatic cancer is the **most fatal** of all the major cancers.
- This year, pancreatic cancer alone will cause more than 30,000 deaths in the US.
- Pancreatic cancer is responsible for more than **1% of all death (from all causes) in the US.**
- When cancer develops in the pancreas it is **almost always lethal** (this is not true of some of the more rare forms).
- The median life expectancy after diagnosis of advanced pancreatic cancer (the most common stage at diagnosis) is 5 to 6 months with good treatment.
- Pancreatic cancer is the **least funded** of the major cancers.
- Pancreatic cancer is more common in African-Americans.
- Pancreatic cancer is **strongly associated with smoking** and appears associated with diets rich in saturated fats.
- There is currently no effective way to detect pancreatic cancer early (such as now exists with prostate cancer).
- Earlier diagnosis would allow for more effective treatment options.

In 2003, 42.3 million dollars were spent on pancreatic cancer research, less than 1% of the National Cancer Institute's 4.592 billion dollar budget. Only \$1,353 is spent per pancreatic cancer mortality, a fraction of the amount spent for the other leading cancers. Pancreatic cancer research receives (per mortality): 10% of the funding of breast cancer (but causes 78% of the mortality), 35% of the funding of prostate cancer (but causes more mortality) and 29% of the funding of colorectal cancer (but causes 55% of the mortality). In 2004, an estimated 31,860 Americans will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and 31,270 will die.