



## **Childhood Cancer**

Cancer is the No. 1 cause of disease-related death among children. About 13,500 children between birth and age 19 are diagnosed with cancer each year. Just at the Medical University of South Carolina, about 70 children are diagnosed annually.

Compared to adult cancer, childhood cancers are rare. Even though childhood cancer incidence rates continue to increase slightly each year, they still represent less than 1% of all new cancer diagnoses. That means funding for childhood cancer research is limited. In particular, neuroblastoma – which has one of the lowest survival rates – receives very little attention because the population base with this form of cancer isn't profitable enough for pharmaceutical companies to develop new treatments.

## **About Neuroblastoma**

Neuroblastoma is a childhood cancer of the sympathetic nervous system, affecting about 650 children in the United States every year. The cause of neuroblastoma is unknown, though most physicians believe that it is an accidental cell growth that occurs during normal development of the adrenal glands. It is a solid tumor, which takes the form of a lump or mass and commonly begins in one of the adrenal glands, though they also can develop in nerve tissues in the neck, chest, abdomen or pelvis. Most children are diagnosed by 4 years of age. About 50% of them have a high-risk form of the disease that has metastasized (spread to other parts of the body) by the time they are diagnosed. These high-risk patients are given a 30% survival rate. That means that 70% will relapse and there is no cure for relapse.

- Neuroblastoma accounts for 15% of all childhood cancer deaths.
- Neuroblastoma has one of the lowest survival rates of all pediatric cancers and is the third most common pediatric cancer.
- No drugs or treatments exist today designed specifically to treat neuroblastoma and there is no cure for relapse.

## **About Funding for Childhood Cancer**

Federal funding for childhood cancer comes mostly through the National Cancer Institute and is distributed to scientists usually working in labs at children's hospitals, to the Children's Oncology Group to fund clinical trials, and to labs within the National Cancer Institute itself.

Each year, Congress approves the amount of money that the National Institute of Health will receive for research initiatives. In 2012, that National Cancer Institute budget was about \$5 billion. Estimates of funding given specifically to childhood cancer were less than 4% of the budget or about \$200 million annually. Of that, only \$34 million was dedicated to neuroblastoma research. Since 2009, funding for pediatric cancer research has decreased 17%.

For comparison purposes, breast cancer research received \$800 million from the National Institute of Health in 2012. The Department of Defense allocated \$120 million to breast cancer research as well. So that's about \$920 million of federal research funding for breast cancer on top of the money raised by breast cancer organizations and pink ribbon campaigns (about \$256 million).

*Sources:*

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