How Many People Are Expected to Die of Cancer This Year?

This year, about 569,490 Americans are expected to die of cancer, more than 1,500 people a day. Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US, exceeded only by heart disease. In the US, cancer accounts for nearly 1 of every 4 deaths.

What Percentage of People Survive Cancer?

The 5-year relative survival rate for all cancers diagnosed between 1999-2005 is 68%, up from 50% in 1975-1977. (See page 18.) The improvement in survival reflects progress in diagnosing certain cancers at an earlier stage and improvements in treatment. Survival statistics vary greatly by cancer type and stage at diagnosis. Relative survival compares survival among cancer patients to that of people not diagnosed with cancer who are of the same age, race, and sex. It represents the percentage of cancer patients who are alive after some designated time period (usually 5 years) relative to persons without cancer. It does not distinguish between patients who have been cured and those who have relapsed or are still in treatment. While 5-year relative survival is useful in monitoring progress in the early detection and treatment of cancer, it does not represent the proportion of people who are cured permanently, since cancer deaths can occur beyond 5 years after diagnosis.

Although relative survival for specific cancer types provides some indication about the average survival experience of cancer patients in a given population, it may or may not predict individual prognosis and should be interpreted with caution. First, 5-year relative survival rates for the most recent time period are based on patients who were diagnosed from 1999 to 2005 and do not reflect recent advances in detection and treatment. Second, factors that influence survival, such as treatment protocols, additional illnesses, and biological or behavioral differences of each individual, cannot be taken into account in the estimation of relative survival rates. For more information about survival rates, see Sources of Statistics on page 59.

How Is Cancer Staged?

Staging describes the extent or spread of the disease at the time of diagnosis. Proper staging is essential in determining the