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Healthline with Yale Cancer Center

Hosts

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WTIC Newstalk 1080

Cancer Survivorship

Guest Expert:

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Survivorship Clinic

Yale Cancer Center

*Healthline with Yale Cancer Center is a weekly broadcast on WTIC Newstalk 1080
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This is Healthline. A joint venture of WTIC NewsTalk 1080 and Yale Cancer Center. Yale Cancer Center is a resource for cancer programs throughout Connecticut, developing new advances in prevention, screening, diagnosis and treatment. On Healthline you will hear from some of the leading doctors in the country. Healthline is not intended to provide medical advice. Yale Cancer Center urges you to consult with a qualified physician in your community for diagnosis and for answers to your medical questions. And now, our co-hosts Oncologists Ken Miller and Ed Chu.

Miller Good Morning and welcome to Healthline. My name is Dr. Ken Miller and I am the Director of the Survivorship Program at the Yale Cancer Center in New Haven. I am here at the WTIC studios with my colleague and co-host Dr. Ed Chu, who is the Chief Adult Oncologist at the Yale Cancer Center. Good morning, Ed.

Chu Good morning, Ken. Healthline with the Yale Cancer Center is our way of providing you with the most up to date information on cancer care every Sunday morning at 8:30 am here on this station WTIC NewsTalk 1080. Our Healthline program features some of the nation's leading oncologists and cancer specialists who are in the forefront of the battle to fight cancer right here in our state of Connecticut.

Miller Each week, Ed and I are joined by a different expert from the Yale Cancer Center. Together, we discuss the myths about cancer, the latest treatment available to people with cancer, and advances in clinical research. Our goal is to give you help by sharing some of the most up to date information that is available, but we also want to give you hope as well. We will answer your questions and give you as much information as we can. If you would like to submit a question about cancer to Healthline, you can email us at Healthline@Yale.edu or you can call 1-888-234-4-YCC. We will try to answer your questions on the air today or in a future broadcast.

Chu Today our program focuses on cancer survivorship. This is an important topic as more and more people are surviving cancer and living long, healthy, and productive lives following their treatment. It is my great pleasure to introduce our special guest, who is also my co-host, Dr. Ken Miller. Ken is the Director of the Supportive Care Program and the Medical Director of the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic here at the Yale Cancer Center. The Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic is scheduled to open here at the Yale Cancer Center this fall. Ken has dedicated his entire career to the care and treatment of cancer patients and has a special focus on the needs of cancer survivors. Dr. Miller has been a speaker at cancer centers throughout the country addressing the topic, "Walking in our Patients' Shoes - The Role of Empathy in Medicine." Today Ken and I will explore the special needs of cancer survivors and discuss the support available to this growing population of people here in Connecticut. Ken, it is great to have you here to share your special expertise and insights on this very important topic of cancer survivorship.

- Miller I have to say it is a pleasure to sit on the other side of the table. It is nice to be a guest here, thanks for having me.
- Chu It is terrific having you. Let's start with a quick overview. What is the definition of a cancer survivor? As I understand there is a strict definition as well as a broader definition.
- Miller One of the older definitions is someone who has had cancer and is 5 years out, but that definition has changed. Now the definition of a cancer survivor is someone who has been diagnosed with cancer, from the moment of diagnosis and for as long as they live, which hopefully is a long time. An even broader definition is from the National Cancer Institute, which includes the family and caregivers of people with cancer. It turns out to be a very large population of people.
- Chu If you take the strict definition of a cancer survivor, how many cancer survivors would you say there are presently in the United States?
- Miller I am thrilled to share that the statistics now indicate there are approximately 11 million cancer survivors. That number continues to increase and has risen dramatically in the past 20 years. If you look at the number of people affected by cancer, the family members and caregivers, obviously the number is much, much higher.
- Chu One of the numbers I have seen quoted is that approximately 3 out of every 4 families in the United States are in some way affected by cancer.
- Miller That is true. When I give talks at various cancer centers, or at survivorship meetings, I always ask people to raise their hand if they had someone, a close friend or a family member with cancer, and typically almost everyone raises their hand, because all of our lives have been touched in one fashion or another by cancer.
- Chu And there are some differences with respect to cancer survivorship when we think about pediatric patients, children versus adults.
- Miller There are. Thankfully cancer in children is less common than in adults, and the other major difference is that the long-term remission rates, the cure rates, are very high for many childhood cancers. There is a large population of children that are now adults facing new challenges as adults who have been through a cancer experience. In adult oncology, our ability to put cancer into remission and hopefully to cure the cancer has increased dramatically, so now we have a growing population of survivors.
- Chu When we think of cancer survivors we typically think of the physical aspects, but it is much more than that. Perhaps you can touch upon what some of the physical aspects of being a cancer survivor are, and what issues we need to begin to focus our attention on.

- Miller Well, I continue to learn from my patients and that's why we call it the practice of medicine. Let me give some examples. We know that there are potential physical side effects and physical long-term risks from treatment. These could include effects on the heart, effects on the lungs, or effects on the kidney, but there are physiologic things as well. The other day one of my patients was talking to me about what she called a chemobrain, which in our terms would be cognitive changes after chemotherapy. They are not common, but they are very significant for people who do suffer from them. We are getting a better handle on some of the causes and also some strategies to help deal with these effects.
- Chu Now there are psychoemotional, cognitive and intellectual issues as well as financial issues.
- Miller I want to address the psychosocial side of treatment. Going through a cancer experience affects the entire family, as well as the individual with cancer. After a cancer experience there are issues they have to deal with while reintegrating into the family. If you are a mother or father and have been unable to participate in family activities for 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 months, it is challenging to get back into those old roles. It is the same with work. People, who before had been actively involved with their career, may have taken time off, and coming back may call for some adjustments to be made on the their part and the employer's part as well. Insurance becomes an issue. It can be hard to get life insurance so some people find that they can't switch jobs for that reason.
- Chu Ken, you yourself are a cancer survivor in that your wife had a form of cancer. How has that affected you and how did that experience change your own approach to cancer patients?
- Miller Thank you for asking me about that, I am glad to share. My wife, Joan, had acute leukemia about 7 years ago, in fact, 7 years ago this month, and it is one of those experiences you never forget. I vividly remember the night that I called and got her blood test results; I immediately knew what it was. It really is a life changing experience, going through cancer. I got a chance to remember how important life is and how important my wife and my family are to me, which I knew, but it gave me a better perspective as a doctor about what it is like for our patients, and how important it is to make a connection between the doctor and the patient. It is a healing force, and we must realize that there are survivorship issues that come up long after chemotherapy is finished.
- Chu Your wife thankfully recovered nicely. She responded to the treatment and is free of disease, but has she experienced any of the psychological consequences of having survived her cancer therapy?
- Miller Well, I have to say one thing, even if she did have cognitive changes, I would never mention it here on the air, but she hasn't. Joan did have significant fatigue that went on for a number of years, that has gradually improved, but it is more than just the fatigue of being 2, 3 or 4 years older. I think it was related to chemotherapy and she might share as well some degree of

posttraumatic stress syndrome because certain things bring back memories, but that has become less of an issue over time.

Chu We would like to remind our listening audience to email your questions to Healthline@Yale.edu. We are going to take a short break for medical minute, please stay tuned to learn more information about cancer survivorship with our special guest Dr. Ken Miller, Director of the Survivorship Program here at the Yale Cancer Center.

Medical Minute

This is a medical minute brought to you as a public service by the Yale Cancer Center. Cancer patients become cancer survivors the first day they are diagnosed. There are over 10 million cancer survivors in the US and the numbers keep growing. However, there are long-term side effects of cancer including heart problems, osteoporosis, fertility issues, impaired growth and an increased risk of second cancers. Ending cancer treatment can be both exciting and scary. Most people are relieved to be finished with the demands of treatment, but many also feel concerned about whether the cancer will come back and what they can do to prevent a relapse. Cancer survivors require long-term specialized care and support. For more information log on to www.yalecancercenter.org.

Chu Welcome back to Healthline. This is Dr. Ed Chu and I am in the WTIC studios with my co-host Dr. Ken Miller discussing the latest information for cancer survivors. Ken, we were just talking about some of the consequences and sequelae of being a cancer survivor, using your wife as an example. Let's review, for our listening audience, some of the good and bad side effects of a cancer experience.

Miller The bad side effects are fairly easy to identify and a lot of them are things that we see. People have hair loss, low blood counts and fatigue. One thing I am very impressed with is the resilience that our patients, and people in general, have. It can be a defining moment in positive ways, and aside from realizing the beauty of being alive and stopping to smell the roses, people can go on and have lives that are very much enriched by the experience. My wife, for example, has been very involved with children and teaching her whole life. She is now very active in working with children, and their families, who have been through a cancer experience, and has taken that on as a career opportunity for herself. There are a lot of people I have seen over the years that do similar things. About 21 years ago we found that my daughter was deaf and the pediatrician said to us, "I am sorry for you. Your life will never be the same." Well he was right. Our life has not been the same, but it has been positive in many ways because of my daughter Clara's experiences and also because of my wife Joan's experiences with cancer.

Chu How has the experience as a cancer survivor changed you? How have you approached taking care of your patients on a day to day basis?

Miller I share our story when it is appropriate, with family members of my patients, to let them know that I have been in this situation; it helps create a connection. It has also taught me to talk about long-term sequelae of therapy, to think about quality of life issues, much more so than I might have before.

Chu We have an email from Michelle in North Haven and Michelle writes,

“My mother was diagnosed with cancer in 2004 and recently finished her therapy. Since her treatment she has really changed how she lives her life. Work is no longer a big priority to her and she spends more of her time doing leisurely activities. I worry about her stability. Is this a common change in mindset?”

Miller Michelle thank you for your email. As I was listening to this question I was thinking, “Good for her,” because in many ways I think we all work too hard. I do not know your mom and you might have a better perspective, but frequently after a cancer experience people do reevaluate and they say, “Jeez! You know, I have been working too hard and I would like to have more fun and do things that are enjoyable especially with my family.” So if what you see is a philosophy change, it can be a terrific sign that your mom is moving beyond the cancer experience in a very powerful way.

Chu Terrific, we have another email from Eric in Hebron and Eric writes,

“My wife finished her cancer treatment almost a year ago and is doing well, although she still is emotional about her diagnosis and treatment from cancer. Are there things my family can do to support her one year later?”

Chu Eric, thank you for your very meaningful question. The experience of cancer does go beyond the initial moment when you find out, and beyond the chemotherapy or radiation. Some people process the situation very quickly; it is a shock and they deal with it. Other people cope with it during their treatment, and there is another group of people who cope with it after treatment; as if they had been keeping defenses up the whole time. They walk through this experience of cancer and when they are done they think, “Wow! What have I just been through?” It is hard to tell without knowing your wife what this experience is like for her, but I would encourage her, with all that in mind, to get some counseling if this grief and distress is unresolved over time. What you really asked is what can your family do? The biggest thing is allowing her to talk and that means asking questions. If your wife is in a down mood say, “What is going on?” and try to start a dialogue. You may not get a full conversation the first time, but keep at it because that’s part of the healing process.

- Chu Another thing that you are working on Ken, is working closely with our colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry, in particular Dr. William Sledge, to begin to focus on the psychoemotional, psychosocial aspects of dealing with the cancer experience.
- Miller Yes, I am very excited about what we are doing at the Yale Cancer Center. We have wonderful resources in terms of social work, nutritional counseling, some of the complementary therapies such as Reiki and massage, and also a growing liaison with the Department of Psychiatry to provide top notch service for our patients in dealing with a lot of these very difficult issues. I don't think that stress causes cancer. I am not sure what does in many cases, but I don't think it is stress; however, I think dealing with stress, and helping people move beyond it, may help in terms of getting better and having a better quality of life.
- Chu There have been a number of studies, which have shown that patients who begin their therapy with a positive mindset seem to do better than those that have a more negative outlook.
- Miller I like to give people a homework assignment. What I say to them is, "You are going to start chemotherapy next week and I want you to picture the cancer cells falling apart every time you get treated, and the other days of the week as well." When my wife was hospitalized 7 years ago, I would walk into her room and say, "You know I hear something," and she would say, "What are you talking about? What do you hear?" "It is the leukemia cells, they are popping." So we had a little fun with that, and I try to share that homework assignment with each of my patients.
- Chu That's terrific. Ken, in addition to being a Director of the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic, which we will touch upon in the next segment, you are also Director of the Supportive Care Program here at the Yale Cancer Center. Can you explain what supportive care and supportive oncology means?
- Miller Supportive care is a field that's been defined in the last few years and involves several aspects. One of them is pain and palliative care. Palliative care, meaning a treatment of symptoms, and there are symptoms that pretty much everyone who goes through cancer experiences, and we would like to alleviate them as much as possible. Pain and palliative care is a part and the other part is the emotional and psychosocial services that are very important to our patients. There is a very strong commitment on the part of the cancer center to deal with these issues.
- Chu We would like to remind our listening audience to email your questions to Healthline@yale.edu or call 1-888-234-4-YCC. We are going to a short break to listen to a survivor story. Please stay tuned to learn more information about cancer survivorship with my co-host Dr. Ken Miller.

Survivor Story

A few years ago, the diagnosis of cancer was a death sentence for many patients, but today, thanks to advances in clinical research, we are turning the corner in the battle against cancer. There are over 10 million cancer survivors now living in the US. They are the true heroes in the war against cancer. Here is the story of a hero from Milford.

My mother passed away last September after a recurrence of breast cancer. Three weeks later the results of an earlier biopsy came back as cancerous. Can you imagine my horror? My Yale based gynecologist Musa Speranza referred me to a wonderful surgeon at the Yale Breast Center, Donald Lannin. Dr. Speranza moved quickly. She gave me the news of the diagnosis on a Thursday and I had an appointment that Friday with Dr. Lannin. Sensing my distress and anxiety over the diagnosis, coupled with the recent death of my mother, Dr. Lannin also moved quickly to alleviate what fear he could and scheduled me for a lumpectomy that Monday. I was then introduced to my oncologist Dr. Kenneth Miller at the Yale Cancer Center and Dr. Joanne Weidhaas who would become my radiation oncologist. I am fortunate. Dr. Miller and the wonderful nursing staff at the Yale Cancer Center got me through the entire ordeal healthy, well, and feeling fabulous.

This survivor story has been brought to you by Yale Cancer Center.

Chu Welcome back to Healthline. This is Dr. Ed Chu and I am in the WTIC Studios with my co-host Dr. Ken Miller, an expert in cancer survivorship and supportive care at the Yale Cancer Center. Ken, in our last segment we were talking about your role as Director of the Supportive Care Program. Let us shift focus now and talk about your role as Director of the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic. What is the Connecticut Challenge? And what is the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic?

Miller Good questions. The Connecticut Challenge is a group based in Fairfield founded by a fellow named Jeff Keith, who is a cancer survivor himself, and a really extraordinary person. Primarily, it is a yearly bike ride, 25, 50 and 100 miles through Southern Connecticut, that has been a wonderful fundraiser with the proceeds going to support the Cancer Survivorship Program here at Yale.

Chu To let our listening audience know, the Connecticut Challenge bike event, as I think Jeff Keith likes to call it, will be held on Sunday, August 27. It will start in Fairfield and if anyone is interested they can go to either the Yale Cancer Center website or go the Connecticut Challenge website which is www.ctchallenge.org. Ken maybe a few words about the mission of the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic.

- Miller Jeff Keith, the founder, had cancer as a teenager and now as an adult he, and other people that experienced cancer at a young age, have realized there are real issues that arise. They are part of a growing group of cancer survivors and the Connecticut Challenge has funded a new initiative at Yale called the Connecticut Challenge Survivorship Clinic. We will be starting this program in the fall and people that have been through a cancer experience will have an opportunity to spend an afternoon at Yale to see a specialized nurse practitioner, a social worker, a nutritionist, and an exercise specialist. At the end of the afternoon there will be a wrap-up session where all the survivors who have come through the program will meet to talk about common issues and concerns. We hope this will be a very thorough way to start addressing some of the issues that people are concerned about.
- Chu And will this clinic be available only to cancer survivors treated at Yale, or perhaps have a broader applicability?
- Miller We hope it will serve the needs of people who are survivors throughout the state of Connecticut and perhaps beyond. There are approximately 11 survivorship programs in the United States. We are number 12. So, the availability of these programs is very limited. We hope to be of help to a group of patients treated here, and also people who have been treated elsewhere whether recently or in the past.
- Chu In speaking with you, I know that you have always made the point that you would like to see this survivorship clinic serve as a resource not only for the local area here in New Haven, but for the entire state of Connecticut and perhaps beyond.
- Miller That is true. We hope to see anywhere from 200 to 400 patients a year and offer direct service, and in the process learn more about survivorship. We are also building a fantastic website with great resources for people that have been through cancer where they will be able to access the latest information, which will include information from Healthline. We are also building a similar, but separate website, for healthcare professionals where they can access information on side effects related to the heart, lungs, kidneys, or some of the psychosocial aspects, so we do hope to serve as a national resource.
- Chu This is really important because, as you have suggested, we are still in our infancy with respect to cancer survivorship, and I think relatively little attention has been paid to this very important aspect of cancer care.
- Miller Your point is well taken. One of the primary reasons for this is that the number of cancer survivors is now a large group and growing. Years ago a cancer diagnosis was very often fatal, and now we have therapies like the ones we heard about last week from Dr. Mellman, that are changing the landscape and thankfully more and more people are living with cancer or living past cancer.

- Chu It is interesting that early on in our careers there was a stigma attached to saying the word “cancer,” whereas now there is increased public awareness so that the whole mindset has changed.
- Miller Good point. If we look at breast cancer, for example, I think there has been a wonderful change. Women now are very willing and glad to talk about their experiences. Certain other cancers are still not discussed as much publicly, such as colorectal cancer, and even prostate cancer. I think one of the things that may help in the survivorship movement is to encourage other survivors to tell their stories; by doing so it will make these topics less taboo.
- Chu For those who are interested in the remarkable story of Jeff Keith, we did an interview with him about a month ago that is on our Healthline website. There is also a young runner who is going to be running across the country in support of your survivorship program.
- Miller Yes, I have to say it is amazing. There is a fellow named Christian McEvoy, who is a teacher in Fairfield county, that has just launched a 3,300 mile run from Los Angeles to the East Coast that he started on Saturday of last week. Christian is running for the survivorship cause and for the Yale Cancer Center Survivorship Clinic. I encourage people to look at his website, www.coasttocoastrun.org, where there is an opportunity to buy a mile, encouraging people to make donations. That mile will be in your honor, or a loved one’s honor, and goes to benefit the survivorship program. Christian is doing the same run that Jeff Keith, who is from Fairfield, did about 20 years ago, and I have to say it is an amazing task.
- Chu If you have questions for Dr. Ken Miller, or for Healthline, we encourage you to go to our website at www.yalecancercenter.org for more information about cancer and the resources available to you. Before we sign off today Ken what are the key points you would like to share with our listening audience relating to cancer survivorship?
- Miller Well, as an oncologist and as a husband of a cancer survivor, I want to share that there is a lot of hope. Thankfully cancer is becoming a treatable disease that people can live with and live beyond. There are a growing number of cancer survivors that have special needs and I would encourage anyone who is a cancer survivor, or living with one, to discuss with your physicians any special concerns that you have. I also want to say that cancer survivors in active treatment and people who are long-term survivors, are a priority for the Yale Cancer Center. That continuity of care following treatment is very, very important. Along those lines I am going to put a plug in here for some of the wellness considerations; to stop smoking, to eat well, and to get exercise.
- Chu Ken, this has been a terrific session. I would like to thank you for sharing your special insights and knowledge on cancer survivorship with us today on Healthline. I look forward to hosting this show with you again next week when we welcome another special guest to the program. And remember to tune in to WTIC NewsTalk 1080 every Sunday morning at 8:30 a.m. for Healthline with the Yale Cancer Center. Until then, this is Dr. Ed Chu.

Miller And Dr. Ken Miller

Chu From the Yale Cancer Center wishing you a safe and healthy week.