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CANCER CLINICAL TRIALS OFFER NEW TREATMENTS

Older patients are historically underrepresented in clinical trials for cancer treatments. However, seniors do have access to certain studies for promising new therapies.

At University of California, Irvine Medical Center, ongoing clinical trials are open to patients with a variety of cancers: breast, skin, colon, liver, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, kidney, prostate, urinary, gynecologic, head and neck, leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

Participating brings early access to benefits such as:

- New and improved drug therapies.
- Prevention and new combinations of treatment.
- New approaches to surgery or radiation therapy.

For more information, visit www.ucihealth.com/trials or call toll free 1-877-UC-STUDY.

Coping With Cancer

When it comes to treating cancer, age matters. An 85-year-old patient has considerations different from those of a 45-year-old.

“The kidneys and liver don’t function as well in an older patient,” says Dr. Homayoon Sanati, geriatric oncologist at University of California, Irvine Medical Center. “In some older patients, bone marrow – the factory for blood cells – does not perform as well as in a younger patient. Older patients are more likely to be malnourished. All of these, and other factors, alter our approach to treatment.”

UC Irvine doctors are committed to the special needs of older patients because the incidence of cancer rises sharply with age. There is a 67-percent increase between the ages 60-64 and ages 70-74. Sanati is the only cancer specialist in Orange County who has completed special training in geriatrics. He works closely with specialists in the medical center’s Health Assessment Program for Seniors (HAPS) to evaluate a patient’s functions before and after treatment. The geriatric assessment includes evaluation of memory, vision, hearing, falls, insomnia and nutrition, “because chemotherapy or even pre-medication for chemotherapy can affect these.”

Modified approaches to cancer treatment for older patients may include:

- Reduced dosages of chemotherapy drugs if kidney function is poor.
- Additional dosage adjustments if the bone marrow does not function well.
- Treatments to stimulate the bone marrow to produce more blood cells during or prior to radiation or chemotherapy treatments. This applies to seniors who have pronounced anemia or low white blood cell counts.
- Avoiding treatments that are known to create more side effects in older patients.
- Dividing the dosages into more frequent, smaller treatments.



www.ucihealth.com/seniors

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SAVE THE DATE

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

**8th Annual Taking Charge of
Your Health Care conference
Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove**

The free, daylong event returns with presentations by noted UC Irvine physicians, health screenings, exhibits, giveaways, breakfast and lunch. Watch for registration information in the Spring 2007 issue of SeniorHealth, or visit www.ucihealth.com/seniors.

UCIrvine



Preventing Pneumonia

Have you had an immunization against pneumonia? It is recommended for people older than 65, and you only need to get it once every five to 10 years. The vaccine reduces your risk of the most common form of bacterial pneumonia, which is a serious health threat. Ask your doctor if you've been immunized.

Coping With Cancer (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Furthermore, for some cancer patients, quality of life may be more important than length of life. Sometimes patients choose pain management and palliative (comfort) care over treatment.

For example, Sanati recently had a patient in his mid-80s with advanced colon cancer. If the cancer went untreated, he had 6 to 8 months to live. With aggressive chemotherapy, the patient might live an additional year. Another option, scaled-back therapy, would add 6 to 8 months.

The patient decided he did not want to go through any drug treatment at all and chose palliative care instead.

“We see this more often with geriatric patients,” Sanati says. But since the therapy had a benefit to him, Sanati told him all the alternatives.

“We really take into account a patient’s preferences,” says Sanati. “We try to avoid severe side effects and balance their wishes with the benefits they gain from the treatments.”

To make an appointment with a UC Irvine cancer specialist, call 877-UCI-DOCS.