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# New Legislation May Provide Medicare Coverage for Certain Cancer Chemotherapy Medications

Currently, Medicare is required to cover cancer medications only if the drugs are injectable and administered during office visits or if they are oral forms of injectable drugs. About 95% of cancer medications fit into these categories, but recent developments of new, oral-only cancer drugs are excluded.

Cancer drugs such as imatinib mesylate (Gleevec™, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, East Hanover, NJ) and tamoxifen (Nolvadex®, AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals, Wilmington, DE) currently are not covered by Medicare. Patient advocacy groups and professional organizations are calling for Congress to quickly pass the "Access to Cancer Therapies Act of 2002" to update a 1993 change in Medicare policy that allowed for coverage of oral anticancer agents that have IV equivalents.

A recent poll by the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS) surveyed more than 1,000 Americans to determine public opinion of the potential change in Medicare policy. Eighty percent felt that Medicare should pay for all medically approved cancer treatments for its patients, and 89% felt that the distinction between IV and oral medications should not exist.

NCCS also determined that more than 20% of the 41.5 million Americans with Medicare have at least one diagnosis of cancer. About half of the cancers in the United States are diagnosed in people aged 65 and older—the age seniors are eligible for Medicare—according to NCCS.

For more information or to find out legislation status, visit http://thomas.loc.gov.

## Yoga May Offer Benefits to Patients With Cancer

An increasing number of patients with cancer are using yoga to help cope with the physical and psychological effects of their disease. Medical and cancer centers across the country are offering yoga classes while incorporating integrative medicine into the mainstream.

According to Barrie Cassileth, PhD, chief of integrative medicine at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC) in New York, NY, yoga gives patients a break from the stress of their disease. MSKCC has been offering low-impact yoga classes since 1999.

This low-impact form of yoga, called Kripalu, is recommended for patients with cancer because it is not strenuous and puts minimal stress on the joints. Cassileth noted that these classes have been very popular with the center's patients, who have reported enhanced well-being. She also has observed physical and psychological benefits in patients taking yoga classes.

Yoga helps its participants practice slow, regular breathing while stretching their muscles, lengthening their spines, and enhancing flexibility. Tests conducted on those practicing yoga have demonstrated lower blood pressure and slowed heart rates and respiration.

Patients with cancer who practice yoga also may feel as though they are participating in their treatment and recovery, noted Jeffrey Migdow, MD, of the Kripalyu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, MA. Patients are more energized and report fewer chemotherapy side effects, he observed.

GlaxoSmithKline offers a 43-minute, low-impact yoga video to oncologists and oncology nurses. To obtain a copy, contact the company's sales representatives.

*Editor's note.* In the July/August 2002 issue of *CJON*, it was reported in News Briefs that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had not yet approved MammoSite™ (Proxima Therapeutics, Alpharetta, GA), a balloon-catheter, brachytherapy device for breast cancer radiation. This device now is approved by the FDA.

## Calcium, Folic Acid May Decrease Risk of Colon Cancer

Researchers at Harvard University analyzed the diet and colon cancer history of 135,000 men and women in two large health surveys. Those consuming 700–800 mg of calcium per day had a 40%–50% decrease in risk of left-side colon cancer. Even a small increase in calcium intake in those with low-calcium diets reduced the risk of some types of colon cancer by about half. The researchers noted that the results need to be confirmed by other researchers, but people still should make sure they are getting enough calcium.

Another study by Harvard researchers found that women with a family history of colon cancer can reduce their risk by taking vitamins containing 400 mg of folic acid per day. The study followed more than 88,000 women for 16 years, as part of a larger study called the Nurses' Health Study.

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