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Fight With Childhood Cancer Goes on at UNM, Elsewhere

Remember victims, survivors for their furthering of research

By Dr. Stuart Winter And Dr. Koh Boayue, UNM pediatric oncologists

“Your child has cancer.”

Words that no parent ever wants to hear.

However, 13,500 children a year in the United States are diagnosed with cancer. Approximately 100 diagnosed are New Mexico’s children.

There are many types of cancer that children are diagnosed with every year.

The most common blood cancer in children and young adults is Precursor B acute lymphoblastic leukemia (pre-B ALL). Each year, 20 to 25 New Mexican children are diagnosed with this type of leukemia.

Treatment of pre-B ALL involves receiving chemotherapy drugs that are primarily given through the blood, or taken as pills, but some of the chemotherapy is given as a shot into muscle tissue, or injected in the spinal fluid during a spinal tap.

Depending on their gender and certain biological factors, children receive treatment for two to three years.

Such long and complicated courses of treatment require a great deal of commitment and communication between patients, their families and the medical care team.

The National Cancer Institute and the Children’s Oncology Group conduct clinical trials for children with cancer to develop better treatments. The Children’s Oncology Group is an international research group that is comprised of more than 200 hospitals in North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

Since 1997, the University of New Mexico Pediatric Hematology/Oncology program has participated in all of the Children’s Oncology Group leukemia clinical trials. Because of our involvement, we’ve been able to offer our patients a chance to participate in clinical trials for which the goals are always the same: Whenever possible, cure every patient; add to our existing knowledge of leukemia biology; and develop increasingly effective chemotherapy.

UNM’s participation in these state-of-the art clinical trials ensures that all our patients have the opportunity to benefit from the latest treatments. The clinical trials require

thousands of patients and the participation of hundreds of medical centers, and yet can make an important difference in the life of just one child.

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and during this time we want to acknowledge the survivors and pay tribute to the deceased and their families, both of whom have contributed to childhood cancer research by their participation in clinical trials.

Pediatric cancer remains the leading cause of death by disease in children under age 15, claiming approximately 3,000 young victims each year. Fortunately, through a continued effort to understand and treat cancer through clinical trials, childhood cancer is becoming more curable with each passing year.