ABOUT CANCER

• The main types of cancer are leukemias and lymphomas, involving the blood and related tissues; carcinomas, which occur in the skin, glands, and certain organs; and sarcomas, which involve muscles and connective tissues.

• Around 40,000 cancer cases are reported to VA’s Central Cancer Registry annually, about 3 percent of all cancers in the United States.

• The five most frequently diagnosed cancers among VA cancer patients were prostate, lung and bronchial, colorectal, urinary and bladder cancers, and skin melanomas. This list is similar to that for American men as a whole.

• Colon cancer can be cured if diagnosed early, yet one-third of patients who develop colon cancer will die from the disease.

VA RESEARCH ON CANCER: OVERVIEW

• VA researchers conduct laboratory experiments aimed at discovering the molecular and genetic mechanisms involved in cancer; studies looking at the causes of disease; clinical trials to evaluate new or existing treatments; and studies focused on improving end-of-life care.

• VA researchers are finding ways to maintain good health and enhance the quality of life of the increasing number of cancer survivors.

• While most of the patients VA treats are male, the department is seeing increasing numbers of women Veterans. VA researchers are therefore looking closely at breast cancer, its causes, and treatments for the disease.

• VA studies are examining many topics related to cancer, including the possible risks of e-cigarettes, the link between Agent Orange exposure and prostate cancer, and gene therapy to halt the growth of tumor cells.

• VA and DoD are working on a program to tailor cancer care for patients based on the genes and proteins associated with their tumors. By using genomics, clinicians can provide individualized care based on patients’ specific biology.

SELECTED MILESTONES AND MAJOR EVENTS

1932 - Established a tumor research laboratory in Hines, Ill.—the first VA research laboratory to receive funding specifically for research

1950 - Concluded, in a paper by Dr. Robert Schrek of Hines, there is “strong circumstantial evidence” linking cigarette smoking with respiratory tract cancers

1956 - Linked cigarette smoking with precancerous lesions

1984 - Developed a transdermal nicotine patch to reduce the cravings for cigarettes

2000 - Showed the superiority of colonoscopy to sigmoidoscopy

2012 - Demonstrated that observation is as effective as surgery in treating early-stage prostate cancer

2015 - Joined with gastroenterologists from throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to develop a new set of recommendations on the surveillance and management of areas of pre-cancerous cells in patients with inflammatory bowel disease

2016 - Formed the Applied Proteomics Organizational Learning and Outcomes (APOLLO) consortium, with the Department of Defense and National Cancer Institute, to tailor cancer care based on individual gene and protein information

RECENT STUDIES: SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

• E-cigarettes may be toxic to airway cells, suppress host defenses, and promote inflammation over time, found a VA San
Among other goals, VA researchers are finding ways to maintain good health and enhance the quality of life of the increasing number of cancer survivors.