

Knowledge and hope help parents cope with pediatric cancer

It's not difficult to imagine the heartache and challenges facing a parent whose child has been diagnosed with pediatric cancer. Cure rates are higher than ever, and there are hundreds of resources to help both parents and young patients cope with treatment and celebrate survivorship. Still, the seriousness of childhood cancer is undeniably overwhelming and frightening.

There is hope on the horizon: in the last 40 years, the overall survival rate for children's cancer has increased from 10% to more than 80%. There are new drugs and treatment methods to help children better deal with the side effects of treatment. And children who have had cancer now have fewer long-term ill effects follow the treatment, according to the National Cancer Institute (NCI) at the National Institutes of Health.

But on the heels of hope, parents clamor for knowledge. Understanding the characteristics, treatment, outcomes and late-term effects for a particular pediatric cancer is the key to coping and walking calmly alongside their child during treatment and beyond, says Jessica Cook, coordinator of Patient and Family Services for The National Children's Cancer Society.

"Being told that your child has cancer launches most parents and family members onto an emotional roller coaster," said Cook. "But we've found that as treatment progresses, emotions stabilize. Parents are greatly helped by having knowledge and people around them – doctors, nurses and other professionals – who will answer their questions accurately and honestly."

There are multiple types of pediatric cancers. The American Cancer Society lists leukemia, brain and central nervous system tumors, lymphoma, and bone cancer as among those most common in children. The Johns Hopkins Sydney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center has a more complete list, with detailed information on [13 different types](#) of pediatric cancer, including germ cell tumors, Ewing's sarcoma and retinoblastoma.

The NCCS provides parents with education, support services and financial assistance, plus education and advocacy for survivors through its Beyond the Cure program, www.beyondthecure.org. It also offers [online conferences](#) hosted by pediatric cancer professionals who guide parents through topics like the late effects of radiation and helping children with the psychological, social and educational challenges that accompany treatment and survivorship.

The NCCS provides ways for parents and relatives to deal with the emotions that accompany a child's cancer diagnosis on the [family support page](#) of its website.

For more information about understanding and coping with a pediatric cancer diagnosis in your family, visit thenccs.org.