



PBS HOME

PROGRAMS A-Z

TU SCHEDULES

WATCH VIDEO

SUPPORT PBS

SHOP PBS

SEARCH PBS



PBS NEWSHOUR

Jim Lehrer

52 Years in Journalism



Topics Video Recent Programs Teacher Resources The Rundown news blog Subscribe rss | podcast Search

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Art Beat
Poetry Series

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Paul Solman's Making Sense
Economic News & Analysis
Patchwork Nation

EDUCATION

Extra: For Teachers

ENVIRONMENT

HEALTH

Global Health

LAW

Supreme Court

MEDIA

MILITARY

POLITICS

Shields and Brooks

RELIGION

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

SOCIAL ISSUES

Social
Entrepreneurs

TERRORISM

+ MORE

World »

AFRICA

ASIA-PACIFIC

EUROPE

LATIN AMERICA

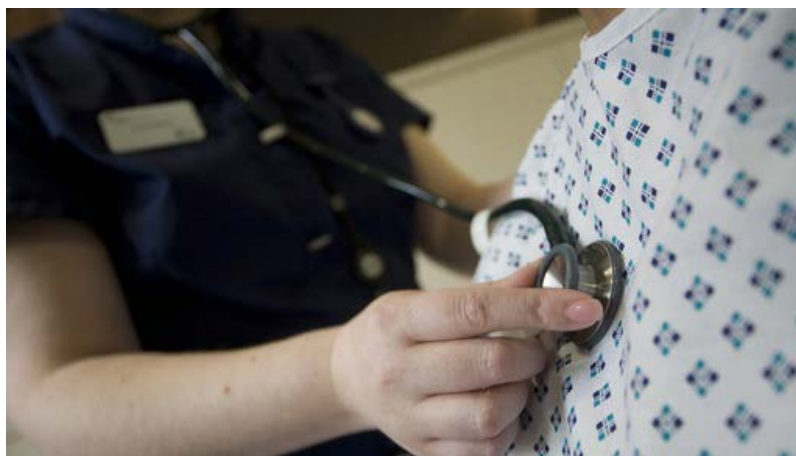
MIDDLE EAST

NORTH AMERICA

Health Posted: June 15, 2011, 2:17 p.m. ET

Cancer Patients Face Stigma, Misperceptions

A growing body of research looks at perceptions of cancer and the stigma for patients, both self-inflicted and from their communities.



Chris Ratcliffe/Bloomberg via Getty Images

BY TALEA MILLER

The last thing a person needs after receiving a cancer diagnosis is to feel ostracized by friends or fear being left by a loved one.

But in many countries, the stigma attached to cancer and the perception that cancer equals death creates great social costs for patients.

Claire Neal, senior director for mission at the **Lance Armstrong Foundation**, which is researching cancer stigma around the globe, told the NewsHour that patients often voice fears of being blamed for the diagnosis, and that some survivors have shared stories about husbands who left when they learned of the disease.

"We've seen that in Mexico, we've actually heard that in quite a few countries," Neal said.

A survey of nine countries, including Japan, Mexico, Russia, Argentina, China, France, India, Italy and South Africa, conducted by the foundation and highlighted at the International Global Health Conference this week found that 25 percent of respondents believe cancer patients brought the disease on themselves. More than half of respondents in China and India agreed with the sentiment. About 500 people were polled in each country.

The numbers rang true to Jesmin Shafiq, a doctor and epidemiologist from

IN-DEPTH COVERAGE

Global Health Watch



ARTICLE TOOLS

Print

Email

Share

GO

Most Watched Video

- Iranian Women Prisoners Detail Torture: 'Death Was Like a Desire'
- News Wrap: Ariz. Firefighters Ramp Up Battle Against Wallow Fire
- After Blunt Warning From Gates, What's Next for NATO?



Watch Full Programs

Take Jim Lehrer...
...to the beach.



Download the PBS NEWSHOUR App

PBS NEWSHOUR SUPPORT FROM:



VIEWERS LIKE YOU

Recent Headlines

June 15, 2011
For 'Chambergrass' Group Crooked Still, Everything Old is New Again

June 15, 2011
Cancer Patients Face Stigma, Misperceptions

June 15, 2011

NewsHour Extra

RECENT HEADLINE:
Syrians Flee to Turkey as Unrest Grows

STUDENT VOICE:
Tanzanian Teen Dances to Educate on HIV

LESSON PLAN:
Calories In, Calories Out

Bangladesh who now works in Australia and was attending the conference. Her sister-in-law in Bangladesh died of breast cancer because she refused to go to a doctor.

"She thought it was a shame on her, so she kept it to herself, that led to her advanced condition and that led to her death," Shafiq said.

Feelings of guilt, that the patient did something wrong and will be a financial burden to their families also contribute to people not wanting to seek medical help, Shafiq said.

Stigma around cancer is a relatively untapped field, while much research has been done around HIV/AIDS and mental health, which are often highly stigmatized.

Research conducted in South Africa, presented by Christine Claypoole from **John Snow Inc.**, found that 70 percent of 800 surveyed households said a cancer diagnosis indicated lower fertility or virility and meant the person was less of a man or woman.

About a third of respondents also said they would not marry someone with cancer and would not allow their children to marry someone who was diagnosed.

Different cancers can carry different perceptions as well, said Anita Chandra of **RAND Corp.**, who is developing a global index of cancer stigma for the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

"All cancers are not sort of created equal in terms of how people view them," Chandra said. Cervical and testicular cancers might carry perceptions on sexual health or behavior she said, while something like lung cancer could be attached to some sentiments of blame.

While cancer activism is highly visible in the United States, Neal said it's only in the last decade that people have really become open about talking about cancer diagnoses here. She said survivors sharing their stories, showing that they continue to thrive after treatment, is part of the key to dispelling stigma in all countries.

Dispelling the idea that cancer can only mean death is also vital to encourage people to take preventative measures and seek care, she said. If they believe there is nothing to be done for the disease, they won't take steps to save themselves.



Print | Email | Share

The PBS NewsHour welcomes your original comments. We reserve the right to remove posts that do not follow these basic guidelines: comments must be relevant to the topic of the post; may not include profanity, personal attacks or hate speech; may not promote a business or raise money; may not be spam. Anything you post should be your own work. The PBS NewsHour reserves the right to read on the air and/or publish on its website or in any medium now known or unknown the comments or emails that we receive. By submitting comments, you agree to the PBS **Terms of Use** and **Privacy Policy**, which include more details.

Like

DISQUS

Add New Comment

Optional: Login below.



Type your comment here.

KaBOOM! Celebrates 15 Years of Promoting Play

Tuesday's Program June 14, 2011
WATCH FULL BROADCAST
TUESDAY'S BROADCAST SEGMENTS:
More Syrians Cross Border as Crackdown Intensifies
News Wrap: Boehner Questions U.S. Role in Libya
Highlights From N.H. GOP Presidential Debate
FDA Issues New Sunscreen Effectiveness Guidelines
Twitter Is Everywhere Now, but Can It Make Money?
Obama Visits Recession-Battered Puerto Rico
Puerto Rico Gov. on Obama Visit, Statehood Debate
'Spider-Man' Musical Officially Lands on Broadway