SCCA Shares Simplified Lung Cancer Prevention and Screening Guidelines

SEATTLE – Alarmingly, more than 200,000 Americans will be diagnosed with lung cancer this year and nearly 160,000 people will die of the disease. In fact, according to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer takes more lives each year than colorectal, breast and prostate cancers combined. Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) experts are committed to reducing these lethal statistics and have developed tools to simplify lung cancer prevention and screening recommendations. The Breath of Fresh Air infographic offers guidance on smoking cessation and the Breaking News infographic provides risk factors and screening recommendations for those who believe they are at a higher risk of developing lung cancer.

“The first step towards preventing lung cancer is avoiding cigarettes which cause 85 percent of diagnoses,” said Dr. David Madtes, director of the Lung Cancer Early Detection and Prevention Clinic at SCCA. “For those at higher risk, early detection is the key to survival. Low-dose CT screening for patients at high risk saves lives by empowering doctors to detect lung cancer at an earlier stage with the option of removing it surgically.”

Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, many of them cancer-causing substances (carcinogens) that damage the cells in the lungs, greatly increasing an individual’s risk of developing lung cancer. Additionally, smoking increases the risk of more than a dozen other cancers, including cancers of the mouth, nose and sinuses, esophagus, liver, pancreas, stomach, kidney, bladder, cervix and bowel. Research also shows that patients already diagnosed with cancer benefit from quitting their tobacco use. Benefits include fewer complications when receiving various cancer treatments, better outcomes from treatments, and improved quality of life and survival rates.

While the risk of lung cancer increases with the length of time and number of cigarettes smoked, it’s never too late to quit. Just five years after quitting smoking the risk for developing cancers of the mouth, throat, bladder, and esophagus is cut in half. Through SCCA’s Lung Cancer Early Detection and Prevention Clinic, individuals can access the Living Tobacco Free Program which includes support from tobacco-cessation counselors. With a goal of aiding individuals in becoming comfortable and confident non-smokers, counselors offer a variety of approaches, including medication to manage nicotine-withdrawal symptoms, tools to manage stress, strategies to break the habit of smoking, and educational information about other resources for quitting. To date, four out of five active smokers cared for in the Prevention Clinic have participated in our smoking cessation program.

SCCA lung cancer experts believe early detection is a proven and successful strategy for fighting lung cancer for those at high risk for lung cancer. Furthering this belief, a National Lung Screening Trial published in June 2011 showed that by detecting lung cancer at its earliest stage and removing it
surgically, patients can expect a five-year survival rate close to 70 percent. As a result of these findings, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recently published a revised recommendation for lung cancer screening. Following the USPSTF guidelines, SCCA recommends anyone with a high risk for developing lung cancer should be screened annually with low-dose computed tomography (CT). The USPSTF and SCCA define high risk as:

- Ages 55 to 80 years old
- A history of heavy smoking (Heavy smoking is smoking for 30 “pack years” or more. A “pack year” is smoking an average of one pack of cigarettes everyday for a year, or two packs a day for 15 years.)
- Current smokers or those who have quit smoking within the past 15 years

While lung cancer screening is not currently a routine part of preventive medical care like mammography for breast cancer screening, the results of the NLST trial and USPSTF guidelines are changing clinical practice. Through the Lung Cancer Early Detection and Prevention Clinic, SCCA lung cancer experts support screening to provide the opportunity to detect lung cancers at an earlier, treatable and curable stage and offer low-dose computed tomography (CT) screening for high risk patients.

For those concerned they may be at high risk for lung cancer or to learn more about SCCA’s Lung Cancer Early Detection and Prevention Clinic visit: www.seattlecca.org/lung-cancer-early-detection-clinic.cfm.

Those who need help quitting smoking can contact SCCA’s Living Tobacco Free Program at 206-288-7766.

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About Us

Seattle Cancer Care Alliance brings together the leading research teams and cancer specialists from Fred Hutch, Seattle Children’s, and UW Medicine. One extraordinary group whose sole purpose is the pursuit of better, longer, richer lives of our patients. Based in Seattle’s South Lake Union region, SCCA has six clinical care sites, including a medical oncology clinic at EvergreenHealth in Kirkland, Washington; medical and radiation oncology at UW Medicine/Northwest Hospital & Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, as well as network affiliation with hospitals in five states. For more information about SCCA, visit www.seattlecca.org.