

Childhood Cancer Awareness and Advocacy—Not Just for September

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The words ‘childhood’ and ‘cancer’ do not even belong in the same sentence. Just the thought of a child battling cancer is almost too much to fathom. It is rare, but not as rare as you would think. It is a fact that each day, almost 50 children in just the U.S. are diagnosed with cancer. Childhood cancer claims more lives than asthma, diabetes, AIDS, cystic fibrosis, and congenital defects combined. Scary, right? Childhood cancer happens everywhere, and it does not discriminate. My family, especially my little girl—an amazing cancer warrior herself --knows this all too well.

Our bodies are made up of cells, which all have a certain job to do when they are working like they should. But when those cells malfunction and begin to spread or grow where they should not, cancers form.

The most common type of childhood cancer is leukemia, a cancer of the blood. Other childhood cancers include lymphoma (blood cancer that begins in the lymph glands) and solid tumors (abnormal clumps of tissue). Solid tumors may occur anywhere throughout the body, such as in the brain, kidney, bone, muscle, skin, and other organs.

Cancers in children can be different than adult cancers, and the causes are largely unknown. It can occur seemingly out of nowhere—which can make early detection very difficult--, or it can be a series of different symptoms that gets detected during a doctor’s exam. Regardless of the type, lives are changed forever from that moment on.

When we look back on the month of September, we know that it typically brings weather changes, back-to-school craziness, and football games. But the month of September each year is also Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. Various organizations host events and display gold ribbons to bring attention to childhood cancer and advocate for childhood cancer research—for newer, even better, child-specific treatments. Just a small amount of cancer research funding each year is directed toward childhood cancer research, and the goal of many of these events is to advocate for that to change.

Although treatments have advanced with modern medicine and mortality rates have declined, more research and treatment options are needed for pediatric cancer. Their little bodies are just different in so many ways than adult bodies. Maybe you have recently seen a ‘Go Gold’ advertisement, seen gold colored cancer ribbons printed on various items, or have seen someone wearing a gold ribbon pinned on their shirt—a symbol for childhood cancer. Or maybe you yourself were/are a ribbon wearing supporter. But advocating for childhood cancer awareness does not just stop when September ends. You can ‘Go Gold’ any time of the year, just as cancer happens all 12 months of the year.