

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. We see the yellow ribbons, the 'Turn It Gold' events, and even personalized stories from families we know. We often hear the words and distance ourselves from the devastation until someone we love is diagnosed and it takes our breath away. According to the American Childhood Cancer Organization, cancer is the leading cause of death for ages 0-19 with 15,500 children receiving a cancer diagnosis in the U.S. annually or 1 in every 264 children in the United States.

Cancer is a disease where there are abnormalities in cell division and growth. The body naturally has regulated systems that control normal cell division and growth to allow for our bodies to continue to function. Most childhood cancers are idiopathic in nature, meaning the cause is unknown. Treatments are aimed at targeting cell division and growth, causing most of the nasty and sometimes debilitating side effects. Although some treatments and survival rates are shown to be drastically improving, effects of childhood cancer have been shown to last a lifetime. Treatments for survival of childhood cancer many times disrupt or damage normal development in a variety of ways causing many children develop secondary health conditions and even additional cancers. Ongoing research is needed to continue to understand and improve treatments. The 'gold ribbon' movement and local 'Turn it Gold' events raise additional awareness to raise research funds to invest in childhood survival and longevity.

Many local resources exist to assist families afflicted with any type of cancer. The Meigs County Cancer Initiative (MCCI) assists Meigs County cancer patients of all ages via its Transportation Assistance Program and the Complex Medical Help (CMH) program assists ages 0-26yrs with medical costs and service coordination. As a public health and CMH nurse, I work closely with many local families affected by cancer to assist in medical service coordination and benefit coverage during what many families later describe as the most difficult time in their lives. Each family has their own story, each child their own heroic tale, and their ongoing perseverance is nothing short of miraculous.

If you or someone you know would like more information on cancer resources or local programs, please contact the Meigs County Health Department at (740) 992-6626.

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