Cancer Patients Unaware Of Risk For Developing DVT And PE

/PRNewswire/ -- Focusing attention on patient groups at high risk for deep-vein thrombosis (DVT), the Coalition to Prevent DVT has found that a majority of people with cancer were not aware of an increased risk for DVT and its potentially fatal complication, pulmonary embolism (PE). Additionally, few had discussed their risk with their healthcare provider, according to a survey released by the Coalition as part of the ninth annual DVT Awareness Month.

Up to 2 million Americans are affected by DVT annually, and complications from DVT/PE kill up to 300,000 people in the U.S. each year - more than AIDS and breast cancer combined. Up to 20 percent of all cases of DVT and PE occur in cancer patients, and DVT/PE are the second leading cause of death among cancer patients.

"Almost anyone fighting cancer is at heightened risk for developing a DVT," said Coalition steering committee member Craig Kessler, M.D., professor of medicine and pathology, Georgetown University Medical Center. "Tissue damage and inflammatory responses in cancer patients may lead to activation of the blood clotting system; the tumors themselves may release chemicals which trigger clotting; and surgery or chemotherapy may injure blood vessel walls, causing the blood to clot. So it's important that patients, their caregivers and medical professionals at all points in the cancer treatment cycle are aware and take appropriate steps to prevent a DVT."

Based on such high risk in this patient population, the Coalition to Prevent DVT and Penn Schoen Berland conducted an online survey of 1,000 cancer patients including both current cancer patients and those in remission to assess the overall awareness and perceptions of the dangers of DVT.

Survey results showed cancer patients are informed about DVT, in general, but are not aware of the increased risk associated with cancer:

- Nearly 70 percent of survey respondents had heard of DVT prior to taking the survey, but of those with cancer currently undergoing treatment - the subset for whom the information is most relevant - only 16 percent think they are at high risk of developing a DVT blood clot.
- Fewer than 1 in 3 respondents have had a discussion about DVT blood clots with a healthcare professional.
- Nearly 3 in 4 respondents (73 percent) were not informed by their healthcare provider of their increased risk of developing DVT with cancer.

Moreover, an overwhelming majority of patients indicated that they sought their

doctors' guidance, but few had actually discussed DVT or its risk factors with them:

- 82 percent of respondents stated that physicians had the greatest influence on their healthcare decisions.
- 86 percent of respondents, which includes people currently being treated for cancer and those in remission, had neither heard of nor read anything about DVT blood clots in connection with cancer and its treatment.
- Only 20 percent of respondents who had heard of DVT tried to find information about signs and symptoms on their own since their cancer diagnosis.
- Only 25 percent of respondents were concerned about blood clots or DVT as a side effect of cancer or cancer treatment.

"The Coalition has long been an advocate for people being aware of their risk factors, which may include lifestyle risk factors - like being over the age of 40, being overweight or smoking - or medical risk factors like hospitalization or other health conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and respiratory conditions," said Coalition national patient spokesperson, Melanie Bloom, whose husband, NBC news correspondent David Bloom, died nine years ago from DVT-related complications while covering the war in Iraq. "As cancer patients are such a high-risk group, more needs to be done to reach this population so that they can work with their healthcare professionals to prevent DVT."

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