



MULTIPLE MYELOMA AWARENESS PREVENTION MONTH



Multiple Myeloma, sometimes referred to as Kahler's disease, is a rare cancer that develops in plasma cells in the bone marrow – a soft, spongy tissue that fills the cavities in bones and produces stem cells that create blood cells, including white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. According to the World Health Organization, a United Nations agency that promotes public health internationally, The Bahamas had a 2% incidence rate of Multiple Myeloma in 2018 and a 2.9% mortality rate, though the disease continues to be little understood among the general public.

While there is no known cause of Multiple Myeloma, researchers have found that genetic mutations can cause plasma cells to grow uncontrollably in the bone marrow, decreasing the number of other blood cells and reducing their ability to function. Unlike healthy plasma cells, which create antibodies that help the body fight infection, these cancerous cells manufacture abnormal antibodies, called M-proteins, that are ineffective, leading to kidney damage, infections, anemia, bone damage, and other complications that, if left untreated, can deteriorate someone's quality of life.

What Are The Risk Factors Of Multiple Myeloma?

For some people, a family history of Multiple Myeloma raises their risk, and although it can occur in young people, the vast majority of individuals diagnosed with the disease are over 60. Compared to other races, black people are the most likely to be affected by Multiple Myeloma, and statistics also show that men are slightly more prone to developing the disease than women. Before turning cancerous, multiple myeloma

begins as a mild condition known as monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS), characterized by low levels of monoclonal proteins. Per year, MGUS has a 1% chance of developing into Multiple Myeloma and is more common among older individuals.

How Is Multiple Myeloma Diagnosed?

At many healthcare facilities, oncologists collaborate closely with hematopathologists to diagnose Multiple Myeloma, often reviewing a patient's medical history before performing a physical exam and blood tests, such as serum and urine protein electrophoresis (SPEP and UPEP), quantitative immunoglobulin testing (Qlg), immunofixation electrophoresis (IFE) of blood and urine, and serum-free light chain assay.

Following the blood tests, if the results are abnormal, doctors will perform a bone marrow biopsy, as it is the only test that can confirm the presence of Multiple Myeloma.

During a bone marrow biopsy, healthcare providers insert a needle into the bone and extract a small sample of bone marrow, which a hematopathologist examines under a microscope for characteristics of Multiple Myeloma.

How Is Multiple Myeloma Treated?

While there is no known cure for Multiple Myeloma, healthcare providers, depending on the symptoms and the extent of the disease, may use a number of treatments to prolong life and improve its quality, including:

- Pain medications
- Antibiotics
- Steroids
- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Stem cell transplant

What Is Something About Multiple Myeloma That More Bahamians Need To Be Aware Of?

Initially, Multiple Myeloma does not present any symptoms, but as it progresses, it can cause the following:

- Back or Bone pain
- Infections
- Nausea
- Constipation
- A loss of appetite

- Confusion
- Fatigue
- Frequent urination

Bone pain, one of the most common symptoms of Multiple Myeloma, occurs in 70% of those diagnosed with the disease, usually involving the spine, chest, or hips. Because Multiple Myeloma reduces the number of healthy white blood cells in the body, its ability to fight diseases becomes limited, leading to increased infections and sickness. Fatigue, another prevalent symptom of Multiple Myeloma, is often the result of anemia, which occurs when there are not enough red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body.

When Multiple Myeloma is left untreated, the bones can weaken and develop soft spots, possibly leading to fractures when under pressure from injuries. According to some studies, within the first year of being diagnosed, 45% of Multiple Myeloma patients experience fractures. If there is a fracture in the spinal column, surgery may be needed to avoid long-term complications and improve quality of life.

What Are Some Of The Steps The Cancer Society Is Taking To Promote Awareness Of Multiple Myeloma?

To help Bahamians access routine medical checkups, we encourage them to sign up for National Health Insurance (NHI), which the Government of The Bahamas provides at no cost. By getting screened regularly, Bahamians can diagnose and treat a problem in its infancy. Furthermore, our bi-weekly newsletter features pertinent information on Multiple Myeloma and information on medical professionals with expertise in diagnosing and treating this disease.

How Can People Reduce Their Chances Of Getting It?

As with other plasma diseases, there is no guaranteed way to prevent multiple myeloma, but becoming aware of the disease and making the following lifestyle changes may help reduce your risk:

- **Healthy Diet:** A balanced diet rich in fresh fruits, leafy green vegetables, and whole grains and nuts may help lower your risk
- **Regular Exercise:** Maintaining a regular exercise routine, such as walking or swimming, can improve overall health and potentially decrease your risk.
- **Avoiding Exposure to Toxins:** Limiting exposure to potential carcinogens, such as some household cleaning products, pesticides, benzene and heavy metals, may reduce your risk.

What's More To Come From The Organization's Awareness Platform As The Year Continues?

Since 2020, the Cancer Society's meetings have been streamed via Zoom, and we are looking forward to introducing face-to-face meetings once again with the addition of live streaming for our international and out-of-town viewers.

The Society has also created new cancer education literature, including information on nutrition and the dos and don'ts of handling a cancer diagnosis. We have reintroduced free Pap Smear and PSA Clinics in New Providence, the first of which was held in May. Our Family Islands clinics are ongoing, with one scheduled for July 20th in Exuma.

What Services Are Available At The Cancer Society?

The Cancer Society offers an array of services, such as:

- ✓ Free accommodation at our Cancer Caring Centre for Family Islanders
- ✓ Financial Assistance for uninsured persons undergoing cancer treatments
- ✓ Individual and Group counseling sessions
- ✓ Support Group and activities for children ages 2-17 years diagnosed with cancer or sickle cell diseases
- ✓ Supply Port-a-Cath kits and chemo needles.

For further information on our services, visit our website, www.cancersocietybahamas.org, call us at (242) 323-4482, or send an email to admin@cancersocietybahamas.org.

