Early-stage, low-risk thyroid cancer patients improperly use radioactive iodine.

Printed from https://www.cancerquest.org/newsroom/2011/04/early-stage-low-risk-thyroid-cancer-patients-improperly-use-radioactive-iodine on 10/30/2026

Many anti-cancer therapies work by inducing genetic mutations, which can damage cells so severely that they ultimately fail to thrive, or are otherwise eliminated by the body's natural processes. Unfortunately, cancer arises as a consequence of genetic mutation, thus many anti-cancer drugs carry the risk of inducing a secondary cancer. For this reason, it is important to effectively weigh the pros and cons of treatment for each specific cancer case. A recent study by Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York reveals that doctors are increasingly prescribing radioactive iodine to patients with early-stage, low-risk thyroid cancer. In fact, the number of radioactive iodine treatments for these patients has increased from 3% to 38% since 1973.

Radioactive iodine is harmful to many tissues, which include thyroid tissue, and in cases of advanced disease, this treatment has proven effective. There has been no evidence, however, that this treatment results in any improved outcome for the early-stage, low-risk patients. Meanwhile, the study reported that for every 10,000 patients, radioactive iodine was responsible for 14 extra cases of secondary cancer.

These findings suggest that while it is important to minimize the risk of relapse, physicians must weigh the outcomes of their approaches, since cancer therapy is a complicated act of balancing the good and bad effects of anti-cancer therapy.

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