

May 28, 2008

CHILDHOOD CANCER SURVIVORS OVERCOME ACADEMIC HURDLES

COLUMBUS, Ohio – When 13-year-old Ryan Taylor was told he had cancer, it was just the beginning of many challenges in his young life. Fortunately, Taylor, now 23, is an example of how children with cancer can beat their illness and live a normal life.

In a study comparing scholastic abilities of children who have cancer with their peers who do not have cancer, Cynthia Gerhardt of The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center found survivors of childhood cancer demonstrate educational achievements, such as graduation rates, receipt of honors and overall performance, on par with others in their age group. Similar outcomes were found in work-related domains, such as employment rates and job performance.

“As we expected, children with cancer are more likely to miss school and perhaps repeat a grade, but we were pleased to find they were doing just as well in all other aspects of school and work,” says Gerhardt, who is also on staff at the Research Institute at Nationwide Children’s Hospital.

Gerhardt said the majority of children who have survived cancer are doing quite well and living happy and productive lives, with intentions to pursue future educational and career opportunities similar to their peers.

Taylor, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, is a reflection of the study's findings. Holding a job at a pediatric medical practice, he strives to be an ambassador to families who are starting their journey battling childhood cancer.

"I want to help kids and be an example that they can get through it too," says Taylor. "Numerous times I've told parents my story and they say 'Oh my goodness, you give us so much hope.' It definitely makes my day when I hear something like that because that is what I am trying to do."

The study, Educational and Occupational Outcomes Among Survivors of Childhood Cancer During the Transition to Emerging Adulthood, was published by the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics.

Children 8 to 15 years old diagnosed with a non-central nervous system malignancy were chosen to participate in the study. Survivors and peers were followed until early adulthood when they were 18 to 20 years old.

The study did not include survivors of brain tumors, which may entail greater risk for cognitive difficulties. Gerhardt says a new study with colleague Kathryn Vannatta of Ohio State's Comprehensive Cancer Center is currently underway to assess long-term outcomes for brain tumor survivors. The goal is to understand more fully their long-term quality of life and how it might differ from children with cancer not affecting the central nervous system.

###

Contact: Kristina D. Day, Medical Center Communications, 614-293-3737, or

Kristina.Day@osumc.edu