

Researchers learning more about deadly pancreatic cancer

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FDA hopes targeted drug research will lead to 'big break.'

(HealthDay)—Scientists are working to find new ways to treat pancreatic cancer, one of the deadliest types of cancer in the United States.

Pancreatic [cancer](#) is the fourth leading cause of [cancer death](#) in the country. Each year, more than 46,000 Americans are diagnosed with the disease and more than 39,000 die from it, according to the U.S. National Cancer Institute.

Current treatments include drugs, chemotherapy, surgery and radiation therapy, but the five-year survival rate is only about 5 percent. That's in part because it often isn't diagnosed until after it has spread.

"Today we know more about this form of cancer. We know it usually starts in the pancreatic ducts and that the KRAS gene is mutated in

tumor samples from most patients with pancreatic cancer," Dr. Abhilasha Nair, an oncologist with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, said in an agency news release.

Scientists are trying to develop drugs that target the KRAS mutation, the FDA noted.

"Getting the right drug to target the right mutation would be a big break for treating patients with pancreatic cancer," Nair said. "KRAS is a very evasive target. We need to learn more about it so we can better understand how to overcome it."

Other areas of research include learning more about how certain factors increase the risk of pancreatic cancer.

These risk factors include smoking, long-term diabetes, other gene mutations, Lynch syndrome (a genetic disorder that increases the risk for certain cancers), and pancreatitis, which is chronic inflammation of the pancreas that causes abdominal pain, diarrhea and weight loss.

Immune therapies, which have proven successful in treating melanoma and some other cancers, are another area of research in fighting pancreatic cancer.

"Not too long ago, the prognosis for melanoma patients was very poor. But with the advent of these new therapies that boost the patient's own immune system, the landscape has greatly improved," Nair said.

"We hope that new research in [pancreatic cancer](#) will ultimately give us a similar, if not better, outcome in the fight against this [aggressive cancer](#)," Nair added.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more about

[pancreatic cancer](#).

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