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Active cancers more treatable says lecturing physician

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MEDIA RELEASE

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ACTIVE CANCERS MORE TREATABLE SAYS LECTURING PHYSICIAN

MISSOULA--

Fast-growing, widely-disseminated cancers respond better to cancer chemotherapy than do large, slow-growing tumors, said Dr. John M. Trauchst, a physician specializing in cancer treatment.

Dr. Trauchst gave the first in the lecture series "Recent Advances in Clinical Medicine." Held each Thursday at 11 a.m. during winter quarter at the University of Montana, the lectures are free and open to the public. They are held in Room 109 of the Chemistry-Pharmacy Building on the UM campus and are sponsored jointly by the School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences and the Center for Continuing Education.

In explaining the strategies of cancer treatment, Dr. Trauchst said that many anti-cancer drugs work by selectively killing cells that rapidly divide. Thus, fast-growing tumors are relatively easy to treat with drugs, he said. The common side effects of chemotherapy-- hair loss, mouth sores and anemia-- occur because certain normal tissues are also fast-growing and the drugs kill or injure them along with the cancer cells.

But, he added, contrary to a common misconception, cancer chemotherapy does not always cause hair loss and nausea and vomiting; many drugs now available for cancer cause minimal symptoms.

The idea of using drugs that cause unpleasant side effects is weighed against the possibility of successful treatment, he said, saying that "it makes no sense to make patients ill if there is no chance of cure."

(over)

ACTIVE CANCERS--

Milder treatment to shrink tumors can maintain a "quality life" for years, he said, and often the patient can take the medicine at home.

In some cases older patients "outlive their cancer," he said.

The cancers with which doctors have the most difficulty achieving complete remission are, unfortunately, very common in our society, he said. These are the cancers of the lung, colon and stomach. The strategy of treatment is often to halt the growth of, and not destroy the tumor, he said.

Breast cancer, which afflicts up to one in 13 women during their lifetime, has a five-year survival rate of up to 94 percent if the disease is detected as early as possible, he said, and a 10-year survival rate of up to 75 percent. He noted that at the earliest time a tumor can be detected, the number of cancer cells is about a billion. Chemotherapy can wipe out only a percentage of those cancer cells, he said, and the body's immune system must take care of the rest.

Next Thursday Dr. Thomas H. Roberts will address the medical implications of the nuclear arms race.

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