Among People With Mental Illness, Cancer Screenings Rates Are Lower

Individuals with any mental health disorder are 25% less likely to get screened.

January 10, 2020 By Alicia Green

Having a mental illness is associated with lower cancer screening rates, according to new findings published in the journal The Lancet Psychiatry, reports Reuters.

For their research, scientists reviewed 47 previous studies that assessed over 500,000 adults with mental illness and 4.2 million in the general population of the Americas, Asia, Australia and Europe. Researchers analyzed screening rates among those with depression, schizophrenia and mixed mental disorders. In addition, they looked at screenings for all cancers—most specifically, breast, cervical and prostate cancers.

Adults who suffered from mental illness were 24% less likely to be screened for cancer compared with the general population. What's more, overall, people with schizophrenia had a nearly 38% less chance of getting screened for any cancer.

Compared with the women in the general population, women with schizophrenia were 48% less likely to be screened for breast cancer and 25% less likely to be screened for cervical cancer. Women with any form of mental illness were 35% less likely to be screened for breast cancer and 11% less likely to be screened for cervical cancer.

As for men with any mental illness, they were 22% less likely than the general population to get a prostate cancer screening.

What's contributing to these rates? People who are mentally ill may live in areas with limited access to cancer screening centers, have limited transportation options and receive treatment at facilities that don't offer cancer screening, says Steven Dubovsky, MD, chair of psychiatry at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who wasn't involved in the study.

Experts note that collaboration and outreach to people with mental illness is key to eliminating these health disparities. That's especially important because people with mental illness face higher cancer death rates than the general population.

"A possible approach to increase cancer screening rates among people with mental health issues

may be to have case managers, nurses, social workers or other professionals who are given clear indications by doctors on what screenings are necessary and with what frequency," said Marco Solmi, PhD, a psychiatrist and researcher at the University of Padua in Italy. For example, managers can keep track of patients and encourage them to comply with screening calendars.

For related coverage, read "Mental Health Linked to Higher Death Rates Among Those With Urological Cancers."

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