

UK HealthCare

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[UK CONNECTIONS]

Lung cancer kills *too many* in Kentucky

By Dr. Ronald McGarry

Kentucky has the dubious honor of having some of the highest smoking and lung cancer rates in the country.

Let us be clear. Smoking is the cause of lung cancer in almost 90 percent of the cases. Secondhand smoke is responsible for most of the remaining 10 percent and then there are a few cases for which we do not understand the direct cause. The cancer-causing potential of tobacco has more than 75 years of data to define the risks.

The good news is that the average number of people who die of lung cancer every year has decreased slightly – by about 1.5 percent – over the last number of years, but this state and national tragedy needs to be addressed more seriously. Nearly 3,400 Kentuckians will die of lung cancer this year. Not surprisingly, patients are shocked when they go to their physician for minor ailments and a chest X-ray reveals their cancer.

Lung cancer is a silent killer. It begins as the soup of chemicals found in tobacco causes mutations in a single normal lung cell. That cell spreads slowly at first, but

cancer cells are well-adapted to growth. This adaptation speeds up the development of a mass until it becomes big enough to cause symptoms or to be seen on a chest X-ray. In a single lung cancer about 0.5 inches in diam-

eter, there are about 1 billion cancer cells which can grow or spread elsewhere or metastasize.

Lung cancer treatment is long and complicated. As lung cancer specialists, we work together to achieve the best possible plan for each patient. Survival rates have been shown to be higher at the UK Markey Cancer Center than many other cancer centers, but as anyone can see, we have a lot of work to do.

**Lung cancer
is a silent killer.**



Courtesy of University of Kentucky Public Relations. Dr. Ronald McGarry is a radiation medicine specialist at the UK Markey Cancer Center.