

HEALTH

Teenage cancer patients learn to look good

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — Life is difficult for teenagers with cancer. And then they lose their hair.

A program designed to help these patients cope with medications that affect their appearance promises to make them "look good and feel better."

"Try to tell a teenager that losing your hair doesn't matter," said Michelle Fritsch of the Texas Children's Cancer Center at Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital. "It does matter, and that's what 'Look Good... Feel Better' is all about."

"Look Good... Feel Better" (LGFB) offers makeup and

hair-loss advice for girls as well as sessions on skin care for guys. Teens meet twice a year for a two-hour program that also includes presentations on nutrition, fitness and social skills.

During the program, tips on grooming include:

- Learning how to draw in eyebrows that disappear during chemotherapy. Fritsch has also had teenage boys express an interest in this, particularly during prom season.

- Using makeup effectively to hide dark circles under the eyes caused by low blood platelets.

- Using sunscreens approximately and dealing with skin blemishes caused by

cancer treatment's effect on the immune system.

"The teens are usually divided into coed groups with no more than 10 kids per group," said Fritsch, who knows many of the participants through her work at the Cancer Center.

A special game teaches the kids how to respond to awkward social moments, and how to handle their peers' curiosity and questions. A nutrition book is provided, as are tips on how to select wigs, tie scarves, and a gift tote bag.

Specialists in the fields of oncology nursing, pediatric psychiatry and psychology and cosmetology volunteer their time.

"The program has really been successful, and it really helps the kids to talk with others going through similar circumstances," said Fritsch. "After all, for most teenagers, looking good is important. It makes them feel better to know they can do something about the effects of their cancer treatment."

Fritsch helped to adapt a similar LGFB program for adult women started in 1989 to one designed for teens, begun last year.

The program was founded by the Cosmetic, Toiletry, and Fragrance Association, the American Cancer Society and the National Cosmetology Association in 1989.

Study gives hope for children with AIDS

Special to Sentinel-Voice

New therapies for HIV-infected children are showing promise.

Chief among the growing arsenal of therapies for pediatric AIDS patients are protease inhibitors, which are proving successful in treatment of HIV-infected adults.

On May 1, a study began of combination therapy of two protease inhibitors, saquinavir and nelfinavir at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston by Dr. Mark Kline, an associate professor of pediatrics.

"Protease inhibitors work by interfering with production of HIV proteins. These defective viral proteins are then incapable of infecting other cells. In adults, the viral load is reduced, making the immune system less likely to be impaired," said Kline. "We are hopeful that similar results will be seen in children."

Saquinavir and nelfinavir are produced by Hoffmann-LaRoche, Inc., and Agouron Pharmaceuticals, Inc., respectively. Kline will study 28 patients, ages six months to 13 years, over a 24-week period. Participants will receive antiretroviral nucleoside agents such as stavudine (d4T), AZT, or didanosine (ddI), in addition to saquinavir, during the first stage of the study. At least one of the nucleosides will have not been received by the patient previously.

Nucleosides work by shutting down the virus' ability to make DNA. Because HIV is an RNA virus, it must produce DNA to replicate itself in cells.

During the second part of the study, participants will again receive nucleoside therapy in addition to saquinavir and nelfinavir. The study will determine drug tolerance and safety when given in various combinations.

The study adds to the selection of therapies available to the pediatric population, who often lag behind adults in being investigated for new treatments.

A recent study also conducted by Kline, revealed that a combination of two nucleosides, d4T and ddI, and one protease inhibitor, indinavir, was well-tolerated by HIV-infected children. The drug combination was found safe in a group of 12 children, ages 4 to 13.

"No child required either a dose reduction or interruption of therapy," Kline said. In addition, there were marked changes in CD4 lymphocyte counts and blood HIV RNA concentrations, which suggests there is potent antiviral activity."

Kline, who oversees studies of more than 300 pediatric AIDS patients—one of the largest in the nation—presented his combination therapy findings May 5 at the annual meeting of the American Pediatric Society/ Society for Pediatric Research in Washington, D.C.

COPING

Relaxing with biofeedback: Proven way to ease stress

By Dr. Charles W. Faulkner

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Biofeedback is technology's answer to stress.

The procedure connects an apparatus to the body to measure its stress level.

Biofeedback equipment has one or more meters that can measure pulse rate, heartbeat and breathing.

When you are tense, the machine will show an increase in your pulse rate, heartbeat and breathing. When you are relaxed, these three biological components show a decrease in activity.

The idea is for you to monitor the inner functions of your body, so that you will know when you are relaxed and when you need to use certain stress release techniques.

The biofeedback machine is strictly a monitoring device. It measures the body's activities and feeds the information back to you.

It has no ability to alter the way that you feel. Once it gives its information to you, you can alter your own feelings.

If the meter on the biofeedback equipment reads .10 when you are tense and .05 when you are relaxed, you must practice keeping the meter reading at .05 in order to maintain relaxation in your body. Whenever the meter reads .05 you are relaxed, .10 means you are tense.

The assumption that biofeedback makes is that you can be under enormous destructive stress without being aware of it.

When you know exactly how it feels to be completely relaxed, you can practice a variety of relaxation procedures.

Progressive relaxation, hyperventilation, visual imagery and hypnosis are a few techniques that may be used in conjunction with the biofeedback apparatus.

A biofeedback device may resemble the large device that your mechanic attaches to your automobile to determine if it is working properly. Or it may look like the small device with electrodes that doctors use to monitor your heartbeat.

The device may be regulated to give an audible buzz or a visual signal whenever your body indicates the presence of stress. The device may measure pulse rate, muscle tension, brainwaves, heartbeat and breathing.

When the machine signal indicates that you are feeling stress, you must identify the situation that caused the stress. Remember the way that you felt and take the steps necessary to eliminate the stress.

A variety of biofeedback

machines exist that are capable of monitoring and measuring different symptoms of stress: The electroencephalogram (EEG) which measures brainwaves;

the Electromyogram (EMG) which measures muscle tension; a body temperature machine which measures the changes in body temperature; and Galvanic Skin Response (GSR) which measures the amount of sweat produced on the skin in response to nervousness.

Biofeedback is only of limited use if the subject has not attained a degree of proficiency in countering the indications of stress. You can use biofeedback to measure your mastery of the coping skills that you have acquired.

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