



## Cancer Survivability: What's Next?

Last week I had the opportunity to attend a Health Care Benefit Summit Conference. During the meeting, a corporate global benefit director for a large international company asked a very insightful question generated from the recent news that there is a decrease in cancer deaths specific to lung cancer with an increase in survivability. The question was:

*“With an increase in cancer survivability among our employees, what will we need to do as a company to help those employees to remain cancer free?”*

Although there could be several answers to this question, I want to focus on lifestyle changes and benefit plan design.

We acknowledge there are other lifestyle issues to consider such as nutrition, however, the lifestyle answer that we are focusing on today is muscular strength and physical activity. Recently there was a paper published in 2019 by Medicine & Science in Sports and Exercise entitled “Exercise Guidelines for Cancer Survivors: Consensus Statement from International Multidisciplinary Roundtable”. What is clear from this paper and many other research studies is evidence that a healthy muscle mass will increase survivability for most cancer patients.

Since this is relatively new information, there is not enough data to determine what impact strength training has on survivability 5, 15, or 25 years after the cancer has gone into remission. Intuitively, it would appear that the strength training would be effective and have excellent long-term effects as it does for cancer-free individuals.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) is one of several accredited organizations now offering a certification program specific for personal trainers to work with cancer patients/survivors. Fitness professionals with this unique certification are able to design exercise programs specific to an individual's cancer diagnosis and treatment. This enables these individuals to gain strength throughout their recovery that is tailored to their needs.

The second part of the answer focuses on the design of the company's health benefit plan. Modifying the plan design to include reimbursement for certified cancer personal trainers/health coaches to work with cancer patients/survivors within your company and to include periodic objective strength evaluations will lead to a healthier worker with fewer medical claims. The investment in a cancer survivor's health plan to remain cancer free far outweighs the cost of another cancer.

IPCS can provide the objective strength assessment, which would take less than 10-minutes, and send the results directly to the specialized cancer personal trainer. The trainer can then meet directly with the cancer patient/survivor to prescribe a program to enhance muscle mass and strength. One very important measure of this assessment is the strength to body weight ratio score. Achieving a high strength to body weight score reduces the risk for disease and injury which would greatly benefit these individuals. On-going assessments can provide improvement information as well as the effectiveness of the on-going strength intervention program.



I love this image of a woman with a very healthy-looking muscle mass. She is obviously very proud of it. Achieving a healthy muscle mass, no matter your age, is very doable with amazing benefits – including better cancer survival rates!