

Cancer in FA Patients

Blanche Alter, MD, PhD, National Cancer Institute, spoke on FA and cancer at our adult meeting in Denver and at Camp Sunshine. Once again, she generously extended her time in order to be an on-going resource for families and FA patients.

Dr. Alter reminded families that FA is characterized by adult-type tumors in younger people. Separate studies (North American Survey, German FA Registry, Israeli FA Registry, and the National Cancer Institute [NCI] study) were noticeably consistent in concluding that the overall risk of cancer is approximately 50 times higher in FA patients compared with normal people the same age. Certain types of cancer (head and neck, AML, vulvar cancer) are considerably higher still. Aplastic anemia is the first diagnostic event in 50% of FA patients, leukemia is the first event in 13%, and solid tumor malignancies are the first event in 30% of FA patients.

Certain factors are predictive of the course of this disease. Patients with congenital abnormalities are more likely to suffer early bone marrow failure than patients without abnormalities. Specific genes and mutations within genes can predict outcomes. Overall survival is better in FANCA patients than in the other complementation groups. Patients in FANCD1/BRCA2 and FANCN groups carry a high risk of early mortality and cancer. Other groups fall in between these groups.

Bone marrow transplantation carries a higher and earlier risk of cancer of the tongue.