

OUTREACH

True Blue.

The only kind of cigarette Joan Kopf likes to smoke.

"If I can't get these, I don't smoke," said the 59-year-old Lincolnite.

Although she would like to quit, Kopf hasn't been able to since she started smoking 39 years ago.

Kopf is exactly what UNMC researcher Ken Cowan, M.D., Ph.D., and his team want for their study on the effectiveness

up to the National Cancer Institute, which is conducting a randomized trial comparing chest X-rays to CT scans. The results from that trial will not be known for several years. A recent report from the International Early Lung Cancer Action Project indicates that 85 percent of lung cancers identified using CT scans were diagnosed early, compared to the national average of 16 percent.

Dr. Cowan said Nebraska doctors need to be prepared to effectively use the spiral CT when it is formally approved as a screening method.

There are challenges, though, he said.

The spiral CT produces a scan of such high quality it detects other abnormalities that require further investigation.

For example, histoplasmosis, a fungus readily found in this

part of the country, causes a respiratory infection that leaves non-cancerous nodules on the lungs.

"When a nodule is detected, it is incumbent upon the doctor to do further testing to see if it is benign," Dr. Cowan said.

Of the study participants scanned so far, half were found to have some abnormality on their lungs, said Apar Ganti, M.D., an assistant professor at UNMC, who is working on the study.

"Luckily, no cancer has been detected," he said.

Nationally, 60 percent of people diagnosed with lung cancer die within one year and 75 percent die within two years. Of those diagnosed, 87 percent are current or former smokers.

The economic impact of lung cancer in the United States is estimated to cost \$5 billion annually.

It is the leading cause of cancer mortality in Nebraska, accounting for 24 percent of cancer deaths.

It is estimated that 175,000 new cases of lung cancer will be diagnosed this year resulting in 163,000 deaths.

"Lung cancer is the most common, deadliest cancer in the world," Dr. Ganti said.

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– Dr. Ganti

Finding the killer WITHIN

by Lisa Spellman

of spiral CT (computed tomography) scans in detecting lung cancer in the earliest stages. Their hope: reducing morbidity rates.

There are 54 people enrolled in the study, including Kopf.

Dr. Cowan, director of the

UNMC Eppley Cancer Center, is hoping to expand the study across the state of Nebraska as a way to train physicians on the effective use of the spiral CT.

It is already well known among the medical community that the spiral CT is superior in detecting nodules too small to be seen on conventional X-rays, Dr. Cowan said. But there is no randomized trial that shows improved survival rates because of it.

Dr. Cowan is leaving that



Joan Kopf is enrolled in the Nebraska Early Detection and Informatic Technology study, or NEED-IT.

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