

Sequestration Could Take Toll On Cancer Research

Cancer research advocates and lawmakers say the sequestration's effects on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) could have a devastating impact on the development of new cancer treatments, with one stakeholder saying the mandatory across-the-board cuts could also impact FDA's oncology drug review times -- an area where the agency has traditionally been fast in reviewing products. The Obama administration signalled that the upcoming sequestration could result in an 8.2 percent cut to the NIH budget.

The United States spends around \$200 billion a year on treating patients for cancer while investing only \$5 billion into cancer research. Factoring in biomedical inflation during the past 10 years, NIH has already lost \$6 billion that would support research. If sequestration cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act take effect in January, the agency would have to absorb another 8 percent cut, the report said.

Budget cuts would come as cancer researchers are becoming more innovative and strategic in attacking cancer cells, and as FDA was approving more effective treatments. The majority of the new cancer treatments were more effective and less toxic than older treatments, which meant they were not only saving the lives of patients but also improving patients' quality of life.

"It is a very scary prospect," said Friends of Cancer Research Executive Director Jeff Allen, who did not participate in the report. "I think having these sequestration cuts go through pretty immediately is concerning. I think where it will take a huge toll is that initially any new projects will be put back maybe years." Allen said if NIH, for example, had already allocated funds to a multi-year drug trial and that trial was in its second year when the sequestration cuts hit, the agency would be obligated to continue funding that trial before it could move ahead with any new research projects.

Lawmakers are also raising issues with the potential cuts to biomedical research. In a statement read at the briefing, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said the cuts could have an incalculable effect on American families. "Our investments in lifesaving biomedical research have not kept pace with medical inflation," the lawmaker said in the statement. "Unless we act before January, the deep automatic cuts that were a part of the Budget Control Act could mean a drastic cut to NIH and NCI as well as to many other fundamental priorities of middle class and working families all across this nation. The losses to human well-being if these cuts go into effect are incalculable."