

## Treating the Teen Cancer Patient

By Amy Bentley



Dr. Leonard Sender  
CHOC Oncologist

Dr. Sender is the medical director of the Hyundai Cancer Institute at CHOC Children's and director of clinical operations and program development at the Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center at UC Irvine Medical Center. Dr. Sender completed his internship and residency in pediatrics at UC Irvine Medical Center and had a fellowship in pediatric hematology/oncology at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Dr. Sender serves as board chairman of the "Stupid Cancer" Foundation and is a founding member and chairman of SeventyK.org, an adolescent cancer advocacy organization.

Dr. Sender's philosophy of care: "I take a patient-centric approach and treat young patients as a person while understanding the context in which they get cancer. My goals are to cure the cancer and achieve a meaningful survivorship."

### EDUCATION:

Medical school at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa

### BOARD CERTIFICATIONS:

Pediatric hematology/oncology Pediatrics

1,960

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CANCER DEATHS THAT WILL OCCUR THIS YEAR IN CHILDREN FROM BIRTH-19

15,780

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF NEW CANCER CASES THAT WILL BE DIAGNOSED THIS YEAR IN THE U.S. IN CHILDREN AGES BIRTH-19



Experts In: Understanding Teenagers Learn more about teen health at [choc.org/health](http://choc.org/health).

### PHYSICAL CHANGES

The teen years are a time when adolescents develop their self-image, seek autonomy or independence from their parents, and deal with issues of emerging sexuality, Dr. Sender says. Keeping that in mind with young cancer patients, he explains, "We try to understand and not downplay the issues of self-esteem and body image. We make sure we are talking to the patients and not just their parents. No one likes to lose his or her hair, for instance. For a young girl who is 13, 14 or 15, we realize this can be quite catastrophic."

### EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CONCERNS

"A teen's peers are really important too, so we try to keep them involved. Peer support helps," says Dr. Sender. "We have social workers and nurses that talk to the patients. We try to make sure we are listening to them. We've taken them out of their normal routine, their school and peer relationships, and they lose control." Patients may also enlist support from a religious leader of their chosen faith if they would like. "We respect all religions and people's faith and how they cope," Dr. Sender says.



### TEEN CANCER PATIENTS ARE UNIQUE

Social and peer acceptance; career and education considerations; and the desire for independence are among issues to be considered when helping the adolescent cancer patient. It's important for everyone involved in the patient's care to consider these factors to better understand how the teen will respond to therapy, the hospital and possibly being in a clinical trial, says Dr. Sender, who noted that fewer teens and young adults nationwide participate in pediatric clinical trials compared to younger children. To help better connect teen cancer patients with their school and peers, CHOC is participating in a research project with UC Irvine that will place a robot in an Orange County classroom — connected to a CHOC patient by a computer — so the patient can interact with classmates and have an improved sense of normalcy. Dr. Sender says researchers hope to learn whether the robot keeps the patient better engaged with peers at school.

80

PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL 5-YEAR SURVIVAL RATE FOR CHILDHOOD CANCERS



## Ranked Among the Nation's Top Children's Hospitals\*

A cancer diagnosis touches the lives of the entire family. For this reason, the specialists at the Hyundai Cancer Institute at CHOC Children's are dedicated to a family-centered approach to care that includes immediately pairing patients and their families with a pediatric oncology nurse coordinator who serves as their advocate throughout treatment. In addition to treating the disease, we are dedicated to meeting the needs of the whole child—emotional, spiritual, and physical. Children shouldn't have to give up being kids while dealing with the grown-up issues of cancer.

Find out more at [www.choc.org/cancer](http://www.choc.org/cancer)



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