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Cancer's Most Overlooked Enemy? Doctor Says One Immune Cell Could Change Cancer Treatment Forever

By bestfolkmedicine · 22/10/2026 · 11 min read



A billionaire physician who has spent decades researching cancer says the medical world may be overlooking one of the body's most powerful defenses against tumors. His claims about patients surviving advanced pancreatic cancer are generating excitement—but how much of the breakthrough is supported by science?

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For decades, cancer treatment has focused on three major strategies: surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. More recently, immunotherapy has transformed the treatment of certain cancers by helping the immune system recognize and attack malignant cells.

But Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, a surgeon, biotechnology entrepreneur, and cancer researcher, believes one particular immune cell deserves far more attention.

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It's called the natural killer cell, or NK cell.

Unlike many immune cells that require previous exposure or specific activation signals, natural killer cells can recognize and destroy certain abnormal cells as part of the body's innate immune defense.

Soon-Shiong has made a provocative argument: understanding and activating these cells could help scientists develop more effective cancer treatments.

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He has also publicly discussed patients with metastatic pancreatic cancer who remained alive and reportedly disease-free years after receiving experimental combination treatments.

For a disease as difficult to treat as pancreatic cancer, those reports are remarkable.

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But they raise an equally important question:

Are natural killer cells the missing piece in cancer treatment—or is the scientific reality more complicated?

Here are eight things worth understanding about this emerging field.

1. Your Body Already Contains Cells That Can Kill Cancer

One of the most fascinating facts about the immune system is that it contains specialized cells capable of detecting and destroying certain abnormal cells.

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Natural killer cells are part of the innate immune system, the body's rapid-response defense network.

They circulate through the blood and tissues, monitoring cells for signs of infection, stress, and malignant transformation.

When an NK cell identifies a suitable target, it can release proteins called perforin and granzymes.

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Perforin helps create openings in the target cell's membrane, allowing granzymes to enter and trigger programmed cell death.

This process, known as apoptosis, is one of the ways the immune system can eliminate potentially dangerous cells.

Natural killer cells also communicate with other immune cells by producing signaling molecules.

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However, cancer cells can develop mechanisms that allow them to evade NK-cell recognition or suppress their activity.

That is one reason the presence of natural killer cells does not automatically prevent cancer from developing.

2. Why Dr. Soon-Shiong Believes NK Cells Deserve More Attention

Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong has spent decades developing cancer-related therapies, including work on chemotherapy delivery systems and immunotherapy.

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He is also associated with ImmunityBio, a biotechnology company developing treatments intended to stimulate immune responses against cancer.

In public interviews, Soon-Shiong has argued that oncology should place greater emphasis on natural killer cells and their role in cancer surveillance.

He has suggested that measuring and supporting immune-cell function may be particularly important when evaluating cancer treatment.

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His broader vision involves combining several therapeutic approaches to help the immune system recognize and eliminate tumors.

One strategy uses treatments designed to stimulate NK cells and T cells, two important components of anticancer immunity.

However, his claim that 99.9% of oncologists ignore these cells should not be interpreted as an established scientific statistic.

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Natural killer cells are already an important area of cancer research, and oncologists routinely consider immune function when developing and administering treatments.

The real debate concerns how best to translate promising immune biology into treatments that reliably improve survival.

3. The Pancreatic Cancer Cases That Captured Attention

Pancreatic cancer remains one of the most challenging cancers to treat, particularly when it has spread to distant organs.

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Metastatic pancreatic cancer generally carries a poor prognosis, despite meaningful advances in chemotherapy and supportive care.

That makes reports of long-lasting complete responses especially significant.

Soon-Shiong and collaborating researchers have described patients with advanced pancreatic cancer who experienced encouraging outcomes following experimental combination immunotherapy.

A published case report examined a patient with recurrent pancreatic cancer treated through a sequence of therapies involving an immune-stimulating agent, genetically engineered natural killer cells, and a tumor-targeted drug-delivery approach.

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Earlier clinical research involving 12 patients with advanced pancreatic cancer also reported a complete response in one patient receiving an experimental combination regimen.

Such observations provide reasons for continued investigation.

But several crucial details matter.

These patients did not simply receive a supplement or a treatment that naturally increased their NK cells.

The experimental protocols involved sophisticated medical interventions, sometimes including chemotherapy, radiation, immune-modulating drugs, and engineered immune cells.

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A successful outcome in an individual patient also cannot establish that a treatment will work for most people with the same disease.

A remarkable case is scientifically valuable, but it is not the same as proof of a widely effective cancer cure.

4. Cancer Can Learn to Hide From the Immune System

If natural killer cells can destroy cancer cells, why do tumors still grow?

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Because cancer is exceptionally skilled at adapting.

Tumor cells can modify their surface signals, making themselves more difficult for immune cells to recognize.

Some tumors also create an immunosuppressive environment.

Within this environment, cancer cells and surrounding tissues can release molecules that weaken immune-cell activity.

Researchers have identified several mechanisms that interfere with NK-cell function.

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These include inhibitory signaling pathways, altered expression of cell-surface molecules, and suppressive immune cells inside tumors.

Pancreatic cancer presents an especially difficult challenge because tumors often develop a dense surrounding tissue environment that can restrict immune-cell access and function.

In July 2026, researchers published findings highlighting how systemic immunosuppression can limit the effectiveness of natural killer cell therapies in pancreatic cancer.

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This reinforces an important scientific reality: simply increasing the number of NK cells may not be enough.

Successful treatment may require overcoming several biological obstacles simultaneously.

5. Scientists Are Developing Ways to Activate Natural Killer Cells

One of the most exciting developments in cancer research involves treatments designed to improve the effectiveness of NK cells.

Several experimental strategies are being investigated.

NK-cell infusions: Scientists can collect, expand, or prepare natural killer cells and administer them to patients under controlled conditions.

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Engineered NK cells: Some researchers are modifying NK cells to recognize particular tumor targets more effectively.

Cytokine-based treatments: Immune-signaling proteins, including interleukin-15-related therapies, may stimulate the activity of NK cells and other immune cells.

Combination immunotherapy: Investigators are studying whether immune stimulation works better when combined with chemotherapy, targeted therapy, or other treatments.

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The goal is not merely to activate immune cells indiscriminately.

Instead, researchers want to direct effective immune responses toward tumors while limiting damage to healthy tissues.

This distinction is critical because excessive immune activation can produce serious adverse effects.

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Some NK-cell-based therapies remain experimental, particularly for solid tumors such as pancreatic cancer.

6. One Immune-Stimulating Drug Has Already Received FDA Approval

An important milestone occurred in April 2024 when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Anktiva, also known as nogapendekin alfa inbakicept.

The drug was approved in combination with Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) for certain adults with BCG-unresponsive non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer involving carcinoma in situ, with or without papillary tumors.

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Anktiva is designed to stimulate immune pathways involving interleukin-15.

These pathways influence natural killer cells and certain T cells.

Its approval demonstrates that stimulating particular immune mechanisms can have clinical benefits in appropriately selected patients.

However, the approval does not mean that Anktiva is proven effective against every cancer.

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It also does not establish that the drug cures pancreatic cancer.

Applications to other cancers require separate clinical evidence demonstrating safety and effectiveness.

This is precisely why disease-specific clinical trials are essential.

7. Can You Naturally Increase Your NK Cells?

Soon-Shiong has emphasized lifestyle factors such as adequate sleep, exercise, and stress management when discussing immune health.

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But can everyday habits actually make natural killer cells better at destroying cancer?

The answer requires caution.

Researchers have investigated relationships between NK-cell function and behaviors such as physical activity, sleep, nutritional status, and psychological stress.

Some studies suggest that regular exercise and healthy sleep patterns can influence immune-cell activity.

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However, an increase in NK-cell activity measured in a laboratory does not necessarily translate into fewer cancer diagnoses or better cancer survival.

There is currently no established dietary supplement, herbal drink, breathing technique, or lifestyle routine proven to activate NK cells sufficiently to cure cancer.

Nevertheless, maintaining good general health remains worthwhile.

A balanced lifestyle helps support normal immune function and may reduce the risk of several chronic diseases.

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What about medicinal mushrooms and other immune-supporting herbs?

Natural compounds found in certain mushrooms and plants are being investigated for potential immunomodulatory effects.

Some laboratory experiments suggest that particular extracts can influence NK-cell activity.

But much of this research involves isolated cells, animals, or small human studies.

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These findings do not establish that consuming mushroom extracts or herbs prevents or treats cancer.

Natural products can also interact with cancer medications.

Patients receiving cancer treatment should discuss supplements with their oncology team before using them.

8. The Future May Be About Combining Treatments, Not Replacing Them

One of the most important lessons emerging from cancer immunotherapy research is that different treatment strategies can complement one another.

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Chemotherapy can directly damage rapidly dividing cancer cells.

Radiation can destroy tumors in targeted areas.

Certain immunotherapies help immune cells recognize and attack malignant cells.

Scientists are now investigating how these approaches can work together.

Some chemotherapy regimens may alter tumor biology in ways that make malignant cells more vulnerable to immune attack.

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Other treatments may help reverse immune suppression within tumors.

This is why experimental protocols often involve combinations rather than a single intervention.

It is also why claims that conventional oncology ignores the immune system are misleading.

Modern cancer medicine increasingly includes immune-based treatments, especially where clinical trials have demonstrated meaningful benefits.

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The objective is not to choose between conventional treatment and immunity.

It is to discover which combination produces the best outcomes for patients.

Why This Research Matters So Much for Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic cancer often develops with few distinctive symptoms during its early stages.

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By the time it is diagnosed, the disease may already have spread or become difficult to remove surgically.

Treatment outcomes depend on several factors, including the cancer's stage, molecular characteristics, the patient's general condition, and the therapies available.

For metastatic disease, established treatment options include chemotherapy combinations such as FOLFIRINOX and gemcitabine with nab-paclitaxel.

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Some patients may also qualify for targeted therapies or clinical trials based on genetic testing and other characteristics.

Researchers hope that NK-cell-based approaches will eventually provide additional options.

The encouraging observations described by Soon-Shiong and other investigators demonstrate that further research is justified.

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But larger, carefully controlled studies are needed to determine which patients benefit, how long responses last, and whether these treatments improve overall survival compared with existing care.

The Dangerous Misunderstanding About "Boosting Immunity"

The phrase boost your immune system appears constantly in wellness marketing.

Yet immunology is far more complicated than simply making immune cells more active.

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An effective immune system needs balance.

Insufficient immune responses can leave the body vulnerable to infections and certain diseases.

Excessive or poorly regulated responses can contribute to inflammatory disorders and tissue damage.

Cancer presents another challenge because tumors can manipulate immune pathways for their own survival.

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Activating immune cells in a laboratory or increasing a blood marker does not guarantee improved cancer protection.

This is particularly important for individuals considering supplements marketed as natural cancer treatments.

Supporting general immune health is not the same as treating an established malignancy.

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Patients should never discontinue or delay evidence-based cancer treatment in favor of unproven immune-boosting products.

The Bigger Question: Could NK Cells Transform Cancer Medicine?

Natural killer cells represent a promising direction in oncology.

Their ability to recognize certain abnormal cells, work alongside other immune defenses, and potentially be engineered for targeted treatment makes them attractive candidates for future therapies.

Progress in cellular immunotherapy has already demonstrated that manipulating immune cells can produce remarkable results in selected cancers.

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But solid tumors, including pancreatic cancer, remain especially difficult.

Scientific progress will depend on understanding tumor resistance, identifying patients most likely to respond, refining treatment combinations, and establishing acceptable safety profiles.

Soon-Shiong's work is part of this wider scientific effort.

Some of his public statements are more sweeping than current evidence supports, but the research questions being pursued are legitimate and important.

Final Thoughts: A Promising Discovery, Not a Hidden Cancer Cure

The idea that our bodies contain cells capable of destroying cancer is both scientifically established and genuinely fascinating.

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Natural killer cells play an important role in immune surveillance.

Researchers are developing increasingly sophisticated ways to harness their capabilities.

And the reports of encouraging responses among some patients with advanced cancers deserve careful scientific attention.

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But claims that nearly all oncologists ignore NK cells, or that a universal cancer cure has been overlooked for decades, are not supported by current evidence.

The real breakthrough may not be discovering a mysterious cell nobody knew existed. It may be learning how to use a well-known immune defense safely and effectively against cancers that have resisted treatment for decades.

That possibility is powerful enough without exaggeration.

And for patients facing difficult diagnoses, rigorous research offers something far more valuable than sensational promises: the possibility of better treatments supported by evidence.

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What do you think—should cancer research invest more heavily in treatments that harness the body’s own immune cells? Share your thoughts in the comments.

Medical Disclaimer: This article is intended for educational and informational purposes only. Natural killer cell therapies for pancreatic cancer remain investigational, and early clinical results should not be interpreted as proof of a cure. Do not delay, discontinue, or replace prescribed cancer treatment with supplements or unproven therapies. Always consult a qualified oncologist regarding treatment decisions and clinical trial eligibility.

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