

Renal Pelvis and Ureter: Transitional Cell Cancer


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Editorial

The tube that connects the kidneys to the bladder is known as the ureter. Most healthy people have two kidneys and, therefore, two ureters. The top of each ureter is found in the middle of the kidney in an area known as the renal pelvis. Urine collects in the renal pelvis and is drained by the ureter into the bladder. The renal pelvis and the ureter are lined with specific types of cells called transitional cells. These cells are able to bend and stretch without breaking apart. Cancer that begins in the transitional cells is the most common type of cancer that develops in the renal pelvis and ureter. In some cases, transitional cell cancer metastasizes, which means that cancer from one organ or part of the body spreads to another organ or part of the body.

Transitional cell cancer is less common than other kidney or bladder cancers. The causes of the disease haven't been fully identified. However, genetic factors have been noted to cause the disease in some patients. This type of cancer can be difficult to diagnose. Your doctor will initially complete a physical exam to check for signs of the disease. They will order a urinalysis to check your urine for blood, protein, and bacteria. Based on the results of these tests, your doctor may order additional tests to further evaluate the bladder, ureter, and renal pelvis. Renal transitional cell carcinoma (TCC), or renal urothelial carcinoma (UC), is a malignant tumor arising from the transitional epithelial cells lining the urinary tract from the renal calyces to the ureteral orifice. UC is the most common tumor of the renal pelvis.

Over 80,000 cases of bladder cancer are diagnosed annually in the United States. Upper urinary tract TCC is estimated to

occur in 5% of all urothelial cancers and in fewer than 10% of renal tumors. Evidence indicates that the frequency of upper urinary tract malignancies is increasing. Transitional cells are in your urinary system. It's the part of your body that includes the kidneys, the bladder and the tubes that connect them. These cells are able to change shape and stretch without breaking and are found throughout your urinary tract. This lets the system expand to store urine and allow it to move through your body.

The majority of upper tract uroepithelial tumors are of transitional cell histology. Squamous cell cancer (SCC) of the urinary tract constitutes less than 15% of the tumors of the renal pelvis and a smaller percentage of ureteral tumors, and SCC is often associated with chronic calculus disease and infection. Grade of transitional cell cancer of the upper tract has generally been found to correlate with stage. Superficial tumors are generally grade I or II, whereas the majority of infiltrative tumors are grades III and IV. Prognosis is worse for patients with high-grade (grades III and IV) tumors than for those with low-grade (grades I and II) tumors.