

Psychosocial Support for Cancer Survivors

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INTRODUCTION

Psychosocial issues are significant challenges for cancer survivors after treatment. They impact quality of life, health behaviors, and outcomes. Addressing these issues is crucial as part of survivorship care.

COMMON ISSUES

Depression

Most frequent new mental health problem in cancer survivors. Lowers quality of life and increases mortality risk.

Anxiety

Complex mix of physical and psychological symptoms affecting up to 25 percent of long-term survivors.

Posttraumatic Stress

Hidden problem disrupting functioning and well-being.

Fear of Cancer Recurrence

A normal but sometimes severe worry interfering with clinical care or quality of life.

Cancer-related Distress

Specific distress stemming from living with uncertainty.

Other Issues

Resilience, posttraumatic growth, survivor guilt, symptom burden, sexual dysfunction, fertility, and reproduction.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL FACTORS

Social Factors

Sexual preference, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status can influence psychological distress in cancer survivors.

Social Functioning

Cancer and its treatment can impact the social life of cancer survivors, caregivers, and their network. Lack of support, work-related issues, caregiver or child distress are common.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

General Screening

Screen for psychological issues in cancer survivors annually using patient-reported measures online or on paper.

Specific Screening

Screen for depression using PHQ-9, anxiety using GAD-7, posttraumatic stress using PCL-C or PCL-5, fear of cancer recurrence using FCRI-SF or CARS, and cancer-related distress using DT or NCCN-DT.

Assessment

Assess the severity, duration, impact, and causes of psychological issues using clinical interviews or standardized tools. Refer to mental health specialists when needed.

INTERVENTIONS

Referral

Refer patients with psychosocial needs to therapy as soon as possible to improve mental health, health problems, and mortality risk.

Treatment

Treat patients with psychosocial needs using pharmacologic and/or non-pharmacologic interventions depending on the need.

Examples of non-pharmacologic interventions

Psychoeducation and self-management, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), physical activity, mind-body activities, and certain digital and telehealth methods.

IMG ROLE

More than one-fourth of the primary care workforce is IMG, so they play a critical role in providing psychosocial support for cancer survivors.

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