

Mental Health in Cancer

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My Background

Osteosarcoma
Survivor:
Hemipelvectomy

Psychiatric Mental
Health Nurse
Practitioner

Passionate about
mental health
issues related to
cancer

Psycho-oncology /
Palliative Care
during and after
cancer treatment

Importance of Mental Health in Cancer

High prevalence of mental health issues with cancer patients

- 33% of cancer patients will experience mental health issues pre, during, or post treatment
- 25% of cancer survivors experience depression and 45% experience anxiety
- 2-3x higher risk of suicide among cancer patients/survivors
- 19% higher death rate overall among cancer patients with mental health issues

Even with these statistics, only 5% of people get help when needed

- 49% receive no support or advice from providers related to mental health
- 66% note no warning about avalanche of feelings that come with end of treatment
 - Feelings such as no support and tremendous volatility
 - First 1-3 years after treatment important time to monitor mental health
- Important to deliver service when and where they are needed

Sources: Cancer patients left to cope with mental health problems alone. 8/31/2021. Mentalhealth.org. Study links mental health treatment to improved cancer survival. 7/10/2020. National Cancer Institute Physical and Mental Health Among Cancer Survivors. 8/2014. National Center for Biotechnology Information

Asking for Help: Mental Health Advocacy for Patients and Survivors

Sources of help can include palliative care, psycho-oncology, psychiatrist/NP, social workers and of course your team.

Counseling/Therapy:

- Stress reduction
- Sticking to treatment
- Mood enhancers
- Changing health behaviors
- Managing worries
- Learning to manage fear after treatment

Find a counselor with specific cancer experience that understand the spectrum of both cancer treatment and mental health



Coping Skills

Find ways to help yourself relax

Journaling

Coloring

Exercise/yoga



Look for new things to enjoy such as
scrapbooking, knitting, reading

Asking for Help: Mental Health Advocacy for Patients and Survivors

Support groups

- Can be very beneficial for cancer patients and survivors to join support group
- Some research shows joining specific type of support group may even improve one's quality of life and enhance survival; this include caregivers
- Group members may feel better about themselves, find a new life focus, have better pain and side effect management, and make new friends
- May elevate mood and help others' needs become more transparent

Support groups can provide safe space to talk about feelings and address practical problems

- Most people join a support group to be with other people who have “been there”
- Supplements support of family and friends from different angle

Asking for Help: Mental Health Advocacy for Patients and Survivors



thecancerpatient • Following

Humor Therapy

Medication options:

- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI)
- Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRI)
- Anxiolytics, Benzodiazepines and Alpha Agonists
- Hypnotics
- Side effect management
- Over the counter/Natural supplements: Always talk to your provider



Asking for Help: Mental Health Advocacy for Caregivers

Learn how to talk to loved ones about how they are feeling

- Can improve emotional well-being
- Remove some of the stress of not knowing the right words or thoughts
- Lessen the feeling of not wanting to talk because you might worry the other person

Caregivers can feel many of the same emotions as cancer patient

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social isolation
- Worry

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a yellow awareness ribbon. The person is wearing a white t-shirt with thin yellow horizontal stripes. The ribbon is held in a way that it forms a loop, symbolizing awareness and support for cancer patients.

Asking for Help: Adolescents & Young Adults (AYA)

Cancer can be more disruptive for AYAs

- Disrupts emotional and psychological growth
- Disrupts family, marriage, children, work

Long trajectory for worry about future

Help can include peer support, cognitive-based therapy, mindfulness-based stress management

May find it easier to interject humor

It's Okay Not to Feel Okay: Do What's Right for You

Don't try to be upbeat if you're not

- Take freedom to have a bad day and give into feelings

Control what you can, e.g., set a daily schedule can include peer support, cognitive-based therapy, mindfulness-based stress management

Understand that people assuming the cheer leader role (or toxic positivity) are trying to help. Show them how to channel the energy in a way that's comfortable



Wrap-Up!

Surviving cancer can lead to positive changes

- Deeper relationships
- Healthier Lifestyle
- Re-evaluation of priorities
- Ability to see own strength

Some degree of anxiety and distress is normal, but addressing mental health will never be a waste of time.

For further discussions on cancer and mental health, check the Sarcoma Alliance website of the Mental Health Mondays blog.