Psychosocial Challenges for the Young Adult With Cancer: How Can We Help?

Young adults with cancer have traditionally fallen between the two worlds of pediatric and adult cancer. They are not children with cancer, yet they aren’t adults either. They are instead a unique population with developmental tasks and life experiences that differ from those in other life stages. Dive into the psychosocial needs of these patients, and explore how you can help them overcome the challenges of cancer at this stage of life.

Target Audience: All Levels

Level of Content: Intermediate

Speaker:
Anne Katz, RN, PhD
Clinical Nurse Specialist
CancerCare Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Full Disclosure:
Nothing to Disclose

Objectives:
At the end of this session, participants will be able to:
1. Identify the unique challenges of having cancer as a young adult.
2. Describe what we know about the psychosocial needs of young adults with cancer.
3. Explain how to help the young adult cope with psychosocial changes after treatment.

Bibliography:

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Anne Katz PhD, RN, FAAN
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Objectives
1. To understand the unique challenges of having cancer as a young adult
2. To describe what we know about psychosocial needs of young adults with cancer
3. How to help the young adult cope with the psychosocial changes after treatment

Young adulthood
- Ages 15 - 39
- > 70,000 new diagnoses per year in North America (more than 1 million alive today)
- > 80% survival rate at 5 years
- Multiple developmental tasks
  - Study and career
  - Separating from parents
  - Relationships and sexuality
  - Having children (or not)

Invulnerable
Immortal
Invincible

Diagnosis and Treatment Decision Making
- Diagnostic delay
  - Awareness
  - Fear
  - Lack of suspicion
- Uncertainty in treatment decision making

Treatment
- Location of treatment
- Transitioning care
- YA units
Friday, April 24

**Dating and Relationships**
- Sentinel milestone
- Cancer as interruption
- Relationship stressors
- Disclosure

**Sexuality and Contraception**
- Sentinel milestone
- Anatomical and physiological (hormonal) effects
- Body image impacts on disclosure
- Contraceptive counseling often neglected
- Assessment

**Pregnancy and Parenting**
- Conflicting feelings
- Parenting after cancer
- Effects on young children

**Family and Friends**
- Transition to independence is a sentinel event
- Role of parents
- Issues
  - Financial
  - Sensitive topics
- Siblings

**Distress**
- Sentinel experience
- Screening for distress
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms/disorder
- Post-traumatic growth

**Return to Work and School**
- Sentinel milestone
- Multiple reasons to work/study
- Challenges
Recurrence, Metastatic Disease and End of Life

- Fear of recurrence
- Reality of metastatic disease at diagnosis
- Complicated end of life care
- Need for advance care planning

Conclusions

- Unique challenges due to age spectrum
- Unique needs
- High burden of unmet needs
- Opportunities for research