Cancer, Depression and Cliniclowns

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Abstract

Cancer is a group of diseases which is known for its widespread threat to human life. One of the conditions that accompany cancer patients is depression. Cancer patients are more vulnerable to depression as compared to the general population. The reasons for this vulnerability might be related to the patient’s emotional distress, fear of the disease itself, lack of appetite, and biological changes in the body. The presence of cancer diagnosis, the presence of unpleasant symptoms associated with the disease, concerns about disease recurrence or progression, and the physiological effects of certain cancer treatments are major factors affecting medical outcomes. In addition, advanced cancer is associated with emotional distress, including memory and concentration problems, appetite disturbance or weight loss, sleep difficulties, and difficulties with activities of daily living. It is characteristic that these symptoms must be present for at least two core symptoms of depression according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (fourth edition), namely depressed mood and a marked loss of interest or pleasure in most or all activities. To qualify as depression, one of these two core symptoms must be present for at least 2 weeks, along with at least four other depressive symptoms. Somatic symptoms include fatigue, appetite disturbance or weight loss, sleep difficulties, and difficulties with memory and concentration.

In general, patients with cancer might be more vulnerable to depression and anxiety for many reasons: reactions to cancer diagnosis, the presence of unpleasant symptoms associated with cancer (such as pain, nausea and fatigue), and concerns about disease recurrence or progression. Besides, the physiological effects of certain medical treatments also influence anxiety and depression. In addition, advanced cancer is associated with emotional distress, especially depression and feelings of sadness.

The human “mind-spirit-body” interaction is to some extent acknowledged in the triangle mental and psycho-somatic coaching and inter-correlations are extremely important. Psychosomatic medicine is an interdisciplinary medical field exploring the relationships among social, psychological, and behavioral factors on bodily processes and quality of life in humans. Clinical situations where mental processes act as a major factor affecting medical outcomes are areas where psychosomatic medicine has competence.

Recently, there are more and more indications cancer patients will benefit from psychosocial interventions by improving the quality of life (QoL) of patients especially in the domain of emotional functioning. For patients with a depression due to cancer disease subsequent recommendations include initiation of antidepressant medication, psychotherapy (with or without concurrent initiation of anxiolytic medication), and consideration of referral to social work services or pastoral services before follow up or reevaluation.

Nevertheless, evidence is accumulating to suggest that identification and treatment of depression among cancer patients will result in reduction in disease progression, improvement in survival rates, reduction in medical costs and improvement in quality of life.

Conclusion

Finally we come to the recommendation that the future of...
cancer should follow both approaches in the interest of the patient. Psychosocial interventions focused on the quality of life (QoL) of patients with advanced cancer are on one hand required besides on the other “hard technological medical” approach such as surgery, high-dose interferon therapy, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Finding of an appropriate effective biomarker via a Systems Biology approach [3] for an early stage diagnosis of a cancer makes the suffering of a patient due to medical treatment for a patient just bearable.

References