



PSYCHO-ONCOLOGY: PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS WITH ONCOLOGICAL DISEASES

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ABSTRACT

Psycho-oncology is an interdisciplinary field that studies the psychological, social, and emotional conditions of patients diagnosed with cancer. The mental state of patients significantly influences treatment outcomes, quality of life, and stress-coping strategies. This article examines psycho-oncological interventions, psychosocial support, and methods for enhancing patients' psychological resilience.

Cancer affects not only the physical body but also the psychological condition of patients. Individuals diagnosed with cancer often face anxiety, depression, and stress, which can slow the treatment process and reduce quality of life. Psycho-oncology emerged to address these psychological challenges by integrating oncology with mental health care. The purpose of this article is to analyze the importance of psychological support and effective interventions during the cancer treatment process. Patients with oncological diseases may exhibit different reactions: some may attempt suicide, while others may deny the diagnosis and repeatedly seek medical examinations.

History of Psycho-oncology: Overcoming Attitudinal and Conceptual Barriers

The formal emergence of psycho-oncology dates back to the mid-1970s, when the stigma surrounding the word "cancer" had diminished to a level that allowed diagnoses to be openly discussed and patients' emotional reactions to their illness to be studied for the first time. However, a second stigma contributed to the delayed development of interest in the psychological aspects of cancer: negative attitudes toward mental illness and psychological problems, even within the context of medical conditions.

Understanding these historical foundations is important, as they continue to shape contemporary attitudes and beliefs regarding cancer, its psychiatric comorbidities, and psychosocial issues. During the final quarter of the twentieth century, psycho-oncology became a recognized subspecialty of oncology, contributing its own scientific knowledge to cancer treatment.

In the new millennium, the field expanded through scientific literature, educational programs, and a broad research agenda applied across all stages of the cancer continuum. These include behavioral research on lifestyle and habit modification to reduce cancer risk; studies on behaviors and attitudes promoting early detection; psychological issues related to genetic risk and testing; symptom management during active treatment (such as anxiety,

depression, delirium, pain, and fatigue); management of psychological consequences in cancer survivors; and addressing the psychological aspects of palliative and end-of-life care.

The relationship between psychological and physiological processes associated with cancer risk and survival is actively investigated through psychoneuroimmunology. Research in these areas continues to shape the scientific agenda of the twenty-first century. At the beginning of the third millennium, psycho-oncology matured as one of the youngest subspecialties of oncology, one of the most clearly defined branches of consultation-liaison psychiatry, and a strong example of the value of multidisciplinary behavioral and social science approaches.

Psychological Distress in Patients with Hepatobiliary Cancer

Twelve studies focusing on stress, anxiety, depression symptoms, and quality of life, as well as three studies on psycho-oncological interventions, were conducted among patients with HCC/CHC. Patients with hepatobiliary cancers often experience a significant psychological burden. Approximately one-quarter of patients suffer from depressive symptoms, while anxiety is even more prevalent, affecting nearly 40% of patients.

Health-related quality of life (HRQOL) is reduced across almost all domains, suicide rates are higher, and stress levels are significantly elevated in nearly one-third of patients compared to other cancer types. Psycho-oncological interventions can reduce the prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms, while simultaneously improving quality of life and survival rates among patients with hepatobiliary cancer.

Key Components of Psycho-oncological Care

Psychological stress: Many cancer patients experience high levels of anxiety and depression during treatment.

Interventions: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and counseling improve psychological well-being.

Social support: Family members, friends, and patient support groups reduce stress and strengthen coping strategies.

Quality of life: Patients receiving psycho-oncological support demonstrate better treatment adherence and improved quality of life.

Psychological interventions play a crucial role in providing comprehensive care for cancer patients. Integrating mental health professionals into oncology teams ensures holistic patient care. Existing challenges include a shortage of qualified psycho-oncologists and insufficient awareness among healthcare professionals. Future efforts should focus on developing culturally adapted interventions and evaluating long-term outcomes.

Worldwide, psychological and social issues related to cancer were not considered scientific research topics until the past two decades. Since then, a new specialization within oncology—psycho-oncology—has emerged. It addresses two primary aspects of cancer: the emotional reactions of patients, their families, and caregivers at all stages of the disease (psychosocial aspects); and psychological, social, and behavioral factors that may influence cancer development and mortality (psychobiological aspects).

Barriers to the development of psycho-oncology have included the limited number of clinicians and researchers worldwide and the lack of validated assessment tools and research

methodologies. However, increasing public demand for improved quality of life in cancer care has accelerated progress in this field.

Psycho-oncology is now gaining recognition as a specialized discipline by integrating consultation services into oncology, introducing behavioral and social interventions, providing training programs that teach essential knowledge and skills, and generating scientific evidence on clinically significant issues in cancer care. As the influence of psychological, social, and behavioral variables on treatment outcomes becomes increasingly recognized, interest in this field continues to grow.

Future research directions emphasize collaborative studies integrating biological and psychosocial variables, quality-of-life assessments in clinical trials, controlled studies of psychotherapeutic, behavioral, and psychopharmacological interventions, as well as cross-cultural research addressing prevention, detection, healthcare systems, alternative therapies, and meta-analyses.

Psycho-oncology Development in Uzbekistan

Between 2017 and 2021, financial resources were allocated in the Republic of Uzbekistan to implement measures aimed at further developing oncology services and improving the provision of specialized oncological care.

The Republican Scientific Center of Oncology under the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Specialized Scientific and Practical Center of Oncology and Radiology were established

(www.lex.uz).

Conclusion

Psycho-oncology plays a vital role in providing comprehensive care to cancer patients. Psychological support improves treatment outcomes, strengthens stress-coping strategies, and enhances quality of life. Implementing structured psycho-oncological interventions in oncology centers should be considered a priority.

It is important to note that no medication or substance has yet been developed that can completely cure cancer. However, by applying modern treatment methods combined with psychological support, it is possible to fully overcome this disease when detected at its early stages..

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