


**Understanding the Psychosocial
Needs of Patients
Experiencing Cancer**

UNC Cancer Network presentation


September 25, 2017

Justin M. Yopp, PhD
Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry
Comprehensive Cancer Support Program
University of North Carolina



Outline

- Background
- What is “psycho-oncology”?
- Why cancer is so hard
- Common psychological issues
- Coping strategies
- Psychotherapeutic approaches



Background & Epidemiology

- Most common cancers
 - Men: Prostate, lung, colorectal
 - Women: Breast, lung, colorectal
- Cancer mortality decreasing since 1990s
- 13 million cancer survivors in the US
 - ~ 1,700,000 new cancer cases a year
 - ~ 50,000+ new cancer cases in NC

Introduction of Psycho-oncology

- Cancer becomes less stigmatized (1960-70s)
- Jimmie Holland starts 1st psycho-oncology service at MSKCC (1970s)
- Cancer care moves from hospitals to clinics (1980s)
- Institute on Medicine (IOM) mandates integration of psychosocial care (2007)

Role of psycho-oncologist

- Address the emotional reaction to cancer for the patient, caregivers and staff
- Address the psych issues that affect cancer incidence and survival
- Behavioral health team-leader and liaison
- Psychotherapy
- Psychiatry

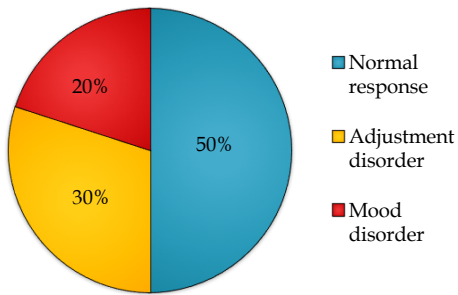
Relevant medical issues

- Illness-specific
 - CNS
- Treatment side effects
 - Surgery
 - Chemotherapy
 - Radiation
 - BMT
- Cure can be worse than the disease

Variation in vulnerability

- Vulnerability to psychiatric disorders varies with phase of treatment
- Peaks at 1) diagnosis and 2) recurrence
 - Often decreases with active treatment
 - Spike in symptoms with transition to survivorship
 - Being in “limbo”

Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders



Common psychiatric syndromes

- Adjustment disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Organic mental syndromes
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Delirium
 - Chemo-brain

Common psychological issues

- Autonomy vs Dependence
- Denial and hope
- Disfigurement and body image
- Guilt
- Family Adjustment
- Financial

Common psychological issues

- Existential/spiritual
- Survivorship
- “Why Me?”
- Grief and loss
 - Expected and imagined life
 - Assumed safety
- Death and dying

Therapeutic approaches

- Individual psychotherapy
- Support group
- Problem-specific support
- Psychopharmacology
- Creating a “team”

Psychotherapy approaches

- Supportive therapy
- Insight-oriented
- Behavioral/CBT
- Meaning-based
- Dignity therapy/life review

Normalize

Coping strategies

- Sweet spot: realistic optimism
- Identify what can be controlled, what cannot
- Focus on solutions or redefine problem into solvable form
- Acknowledge & put into perspective
- Psycho-education
 - Thoughts, Emotions, Behaviors

Coping strategies

- Identify support networks
 - Family, friends, community
 - Cancer-specific organizations
- Open, mutual communication in relationships
- Spiritual assistance
- Maintain “normal” when possible

Parenting with Cancer

- Preserve structure, stability
 - Discipline & Warmth
- Be honest with children
- Actions, explanations = care goals
 - Help children anticipate
- Welcome questions & discussion
 - Mad-Sad-Happy-Glad game
- Parents: give yourself a break
