

How does childhood cancer impact the parents' relationship?

Introduction

Family Centred Care means respecting family diversity and encouraging family to participate in the child's care where safely possible (Institute for Patient and Family Centred Care, 2017).



The whole family comes under distress with childhood cancer, with the emotional suffering and medical demands of treatment significantly affecting and altering the family's routines, reducing the family's quality of life.

The parents' psychological adjustment has a crucial role in management and coping of childhood cancer, high levels of parental distress often results in the child behaving badly and poorer adjustment to their diagnosis.

Method

A qualitative literature review was undertaken (Fig. 1). The 8 included studies were critically appraised and analysed using thematic analysis.

CINAHL, BND, Psych INFO, and Medline searched (n=97)

Data limiters applied (n=80)

Exclusion and inclusion criteria (n=23)

Duplicates removed (n=8)

Studies included in the review (n=8)

Findings

Parents report marital dissatisfaction to be worse during the first-year post-cancer diagnosis (Burns et al, 2017).

Parents report that the constant stress of negative events overtime had an overall negative effect on their relationship.

Generally the mother would take over the cares of the child, and the father would continue to work and look after the house – this would sometimes create role conflict as the boundaries and expectations of the changing roles were unclear.

Silva-Rodrigues et al (2016) explains that the experience gave the parents an opportunity to reflect and examine their values and priorities.

Mothers began to feel unsupported by their spouse, thus fathers began to feel guilty as they struggled to balance supporting their family and work responsibilities (Kim et al, 2018).

Physical distancing and lack of time spent together effected the intimacy and sexual relationship between the parents by 40% (Weiner et al, 2016), thus contributing to the levels of marital dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

There are positive and negative changes in the parents' relationship, however future research needs to explore the impact of childhood cancer on parents who are of the same sex and families with step-parents.

Future Implications

Future implications include promoting and encouraging parents to express their feelings, seek mutual support and establish a partnership in dealing with the child's illness.

Reference:

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- Institute for Patient and Family Centred Care (2017). *Patient- and Family-Centred Care*. Available at: <http://www.ipfcc.org/about/pfcc.html>. Accessed 14/11/19.
- Kim, M., Yi, J., Sang, J., and Molloy, J. (2018) The impact of a child's cancer on the father's relationship with his spouse in Korea. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 21(1) pp. 166-175.
- Silva-Rodrigues, F., Pan, R., Sposito, A., Alvrarenga, W., and Nascimento I. (2016) Childhood cancer: Impact on parents' marital dynamics. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*. 23(1) pp. 34-42.
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