



INTERVENTIONS AND HOPE, AS HEALING STRATEGIES IN SURVIVING CANCER

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ABSTRACT

Cancer is a life changing diagnosis that affects not just the physical health but also has a vast impact on the emotional and psychological health. Cancer as a disease has existed since long time. Knowledge about Cancer has been gradually gathered over the centuries. Today, the incidence of cancer is seen increasing in most parts of the world. A sense of fear is associated with this disease due to many myths about it. But it is increasingly realized now that, cancer is a preventable disease. Authentic and scientific knowledge about the disease and awareness can help in prevention. Several psychological factors are implicated in the causes and course of cancer, so cancer needs to be addressed in this perspective. Since cancer is a disease with which people often live for many years, interventions to reduce risk factors and to improve coping are essential. As patients undergo the challenging journey of cancer, hope can have a profound impact on recovery. Cultivating hope can facilitate a positive mindset which can lead to better emotional well being and physical health outcomes. Hope can provide a sense of purpose, motivation, and optimism in the face of challenging cancer journey. Despite the challenges of a cancer diagnosis, individuals can find hope in various aspects of their lives, including their social support networks, personal values and spiritual beliefs. By recognizing and nurturing these sources of hope, patients can cultivate a sense of inner strength that enables them to navigate the complexities of cancer treatment with resilience and positivity. Hope plays an important role in surviving cancer. Hope means having a positive will to survive which affects the positive outcome. Hope keeps one alive

to fight for another day, a month, a year, and a return to better health. It affords another opportunity to respond to therapy and to keep alive.

Key Words: Cancer, Resilience, Hope, Optimism, Coping, Diagnosis, Therapy.

Cancer, as a disease has existed since the inception of mankind. Cancer is a disease that results from the dysfunction of DNA, the part of cellular programming which controls cell growth and reproduction. The causes, symptoms and treatment for different types of cancer, vary, making it difficult to study. The precipitating and co-occurring risk factors for cancer may be difficult to identify. Many cancer run in families, partly because of genetic factors. However, family history does not always imply a genetically inherited predisposition to cancer. Many things run in families besides genes, including diet, and other lifestyle factors. On the whole, cancer is more closely tied to lifestyle than to genetics (Lichtenstein, et. al., 2000) Infectious agents are implicated in some cancers as cervical cancer and some types of gastric cancer. Some cancers are ethnically linked while, some are culturally linked through life style. Chronic malnourishment, high level of fat consumption, certain food additives (as nitrates) and alcohol consumption may lead to cancer development. (American Cancer Society, February' 2016) Different psychosocial factors are also responsible for the initiation and progression of cancer. Though stress has not been linked to the onset of cancer, but stress occurring due to lack or loss of social support may affect the onset and course of cancer. Experiencing major social stressors such as divorce, marital quarrelling, infidelity, financial stress may increase risk for cervical cancer (Coker, et.al.,2003) Researchers have examined the role of psychological factors in the progression of cancer, being rapid or slow. Avoidance, or the inability to confront the disease, lead to rapid progression. (Epping-Jordan, et. al., 1994). Avoidant or passive coping is a risk factor for psychological distress, depression, poor sleep, and other risk-related factors which may represent additional influences on the course of cancer (Hoyt, et al., 2009). Negative expectations regarding one's situation leads to more rapid course of illness, among young cancer patients (Schulz, et al, 1996).

Cancer gives rise to different problems, as, physical disability, family and marital disruptions, sexual difficulties, self esteem problems and general psychological distress. Moreover, cancer patients suffer from higher levels of anxiety, emotionality, sensitivity, depression, insecurity and tension. They lack general level of happiness and satisfaction with life. Sleep loss, fatigue, depression and physical debility are common symptoms (Jim, et al., 2013). Nutrition can be compromised by cancer and its treatment, and thus nutrition therapy is needed (Laviano, et al., 2011). Some difficulties may arise as a consequence of treatment given. Organs that are vital to body functions may be taken over by prosthesis. Chemotherapy may cause nausea and vomiting, and in some cases may lead to the condition of chemo-brain. Chemo-brain is a diffuse mental cloudiness that can compromise work, social activities and sense of self. (Nelson, et al., 2014) Diagnosing and treating chemo-brain is difficult because anxiety, depression and worry can themselves produce such symptoms (Berman, et. al., 2014). It is fortunate that, in recent years, chemotherapies with less harmful side effects have been developed. It has been

observed that a number of people diagnosed with cancer, live a long and fulfilling life, free of disease. But many other face recurrences and some others face active cancers over long term, knowing that the disease will ultimately be fatal. Moreover, facing intermittent and long term depression may lead to a compromised quality of life (Low & Stanton, 2015). Stress aggravates virtually all illness, and cancer is no exception. Depression, fatigue and pain are common symptoms experienced, and they may be caused or aggravated by stress hormones (Thornton. et al., 2010)

Interventions

Since stress can increase the likelihood of depression and worsen physical symptoms, thus interventions directed to stress management may be helpful. Fear of recurrence of the disease which increases especially at the time of follow-up visits, is a major source of anxiety and thus needs intervention (Mc Ginty, et. al., 2016) Intervening to improve social support early on, at the time of diagnosis and treatment is recommended (Thompson, et al., 2013). Prior to treatment, educational interventions are vital (Zimmerman, et. al., 2007) Some behavioral interventions including relaxation therapy, hypnosis, cognitive-reappraisal techniques, visual imaging and self-hypnosis are helpful in managing pain and discomfort among patients (Ward, et. al., 2008). Writing interventions involving expressive disclosure or writing about benefits derived from cancer, have been found to show fewer symptoms and fewer medical appointments for cancer-related problems (Low, et al, 2006). Cognitive behavioural interventions, individually, in groups, or through the internet, focus on reducing depression, managing stress, controlling fear of recurrence and developing good coping. skills (Stagl, et al., 2015). Thus intervention programmes along with treatment may ensure positive life with quality and satisfaction. In general, it has been observed that the use of avoidance or emotion-focused coping, lead to poor psychological adjustment, poor adherence to life style changes, medication and self-management. Active and problem focused coping show a positive association with successful adjustment, both physically and psychologically. Researches indicate that optimism is positively associated with psychological and physical well-being. Optimism help people to cope with stress and reduce risk of illness. Social isolation may result in worsening of an illness. Cancer patients who believe that they had control over at least some aspect of their illness, show better adjustment, use more active coping strategies and also plan for their future. The motivational aspect of future orientation is the anticipation of instrumental acts to attain positive outcomes and to avoid negative future development. (Agrawal & Pandey, 1998; Upadhaya, 2002)

Hope: A Strategy In Healing

In recent years, medical professionals have increasingly recognized the impact of hope in cancer healing. The role of hope in healing cancer, extends beyond a mere emotional boosts. Studies show that hope can positively impact the mind-body connection and support the healing process. It can also promote a positive mindset and empower patients throughout their cancer journey, thus enhancing their overall well-being. Hope can be a major tool for empowerment and an element for sustaining life, and the will to live. Since patients see their future as unpredictable, hope keeps them alive to endure treatments and face the personal and social adversities. The state of hope can also be very fragile, as, anything that demoralizes the patient can negate the feelings of hope. Also, the feeling of hope, and will to live may vary from day to day experience of one's current physical status and psychological outlook. Hope is to be kept alive, to live, and to recover. Maintaining a resilient attitude rather than a feeling of despair, is central to remain hopeful. Since hope is often a shared feeling with one's family and friends, so they have also an important role in keeping the hope alive.

Hope is such a powerful strategy in healing cancer that, it keeps one alive to fight for another day, a month, a year, and finally a return to better health. It affords another opportunity to respond positively to therapy and to live. Thus, having a hopeful attitude can positively influence the mind-body connection and support the healing process. Hope has the potential to reduce stress and anxiety levels, boost the immune system and increase overall well-being in cancer patients. Moreover, hope can promote a positive mindset and empower patients to take an active role in their treatment journey. The mind-body connection has been well established in scientific researches. When a person experiences positive emotion, like hope, the brain releases such chemicals that can have a positive impact on the body. Thus, hope can enhance the body's immune response and promote healing. Being hopeful may provide a sense of empowerment, enabling patients to take an active role in their care and treatment decisions, and this feeling of control, promotes healing. Since the treatment of cancer is itself challenging, both physically and emotionally, so, having a positive mindset of being hopeful can make a significant difference in the treatment journey. Researches show that patients who maintain a hopeful attitude, experience less pain, fatigue and other symptoms related to cancer treatment. Being hopeful can provide patients with the motivation and strength to persevere through treatment, and overcome obstacles. Patients with a sense of hope may be more willing to seek out support and resources, to help them cope with their diagnosis. They may also be more likely to make positive lifestyle changes, like, adopting a healthier diet or exercise routine, to support their treatment. During their treatment

course, patients may often feel overwhelmed and experience a range of negative emotions, and they may feel uncertain about their ability to overcome the disease. However, practicing hope can help them maintain a positive attitude and outlook, and promote a sense of control over their circumstances. After the treatment course, patients may have feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about recurrence, and to them returning to normal life may seem daunting. By empowering hope for cancer survivors, they can move forward with a sense of optimism and motivation. Thus, being hopeful can facilitate the transition from a cancer patient to a cancer survivor, providing a renewed sense of purpose and meaning in life. It can also help survivors to develop resilience and personal growth after facing the traumatic disease. This leads them to develop a more positive outlook and outcome.

Hope can be fostered by using some practical strategies, as, setting realistic goals, maintaining a positive mindset, seeking support from loved ones, and incorporating relaxation techniques and mindful practices. By incorporating these strategies into their daily routine, cancer patients become capable in cultivating hope and resilience, which can help them navigate their treatment journey with great ease. Moreover, patients require a supportive environment to cope with a disease that brings much uncertainty about their future. Feeling supported and cared for, is vital in fostering hope. Positive and compassionate communication from health care providers, family members, and the community, is helpful in promoting a positive mindset which is much beneficial in treatment as well as the outlook of patients. Positive and supportive environment is helpful in building resilience and coping mechanisms which significantly impacts long-term survivorship. Continual support and encouragement can help cancer survivors move beyond treatment, and rebuild their lives. Positivity and hope have transformative effects on cancer patients' journey towards healing. Studies show that optimistic patients tend to have better treatment outcomes, higher quality of life, and lower risk of recurrence. Positivity and hope also combat the effects of stress, reduce anxiety and depression, increase motivation and resilience in the face of cancer. Patients who maintain a positive mindset and cultivate hope, demonstrate the ability to overcome adversity and achieve better outcomes. Though uncertainty is the reality of cancer journey, but embracing hope can help patients navigate it, with strength and optimism.

Surviving cancer is a journey that requires ongoing care and attention. Fostering hope is an integral part of long-term survivorship and can positively impact survivor's physical and emotional well-being. Recent researches show that hopeful attitudes and positive emotions can have a significant impact on long-term survivorship outcomes. By maintaining a sense of hope, cancer survivors can improve their ability to cope with physical and emotional challenges. It can

also help them regain a sense of control over their lives and inspire them to pursue new goals and dreams. However, maintaining hope can be difficult, especially in the face of uncertainty. Empowering hope for cancer survivors involves ongoing support and resources to promote emotional well-being, physical health, and spiritual growth. Providing a nurturing and supportive environment that prioritizes fostering hope, can positively impact the cancer journey. Overall, the healing power of hope in cancer care and long-term survivorship cannot be underestimated. By maintaining hope, cancer survivors can improve their overall well-being and quality of life and live a fulfilling life beyond cancer. Studies have shown that a positive mindset can significantly impact cancer treatment outcomes. Hope can provide a sense of purpose, motivation and optimism in the face of challenging cancer journey. It can help patients maintain a sense of control over their lives, even in the midst of uncertainty. Hope leads to resilience which is helpful in facing the adversities of cancer. Thus, hope can have a profound impact on cancer recovery, influencing not just the emotional well-being of patients but also their physical health. Individuals with a more positive outlook towards life, tend to have better treatment outcomes, and an improved ability to cope with the challenge of cancer. By fostering a hopeful mindset, patients can enhance their body's natural power to heal and promote a sense of overall well-being. A supportive environment and availability of resources that empower patients, are helpful maintaining hope and resilience, throughout the cancer journey. The role of healthcare professionals are important in this direction. Moreover care and support provided by family and friends can do miracles in maintaining a hopeful attitude. We must not let cancer take away our hope but we must fight and win cancer by being hopeful.

Prevention

Prevention is better than cure, and cancer as a disease can also be prevented. Approximately 80% of all cancers are associated with environmental causes, as, smoking, chewing tobacco, dietary substances, alcohol consumption, radiation, work-place substance exposure, drugs etc. The cancer pattern is not static and over the years significant changes are seen. The variation in cancer pattern is due to the life style of people in a particular place. Lifestyle denotes habits, customs, diet, addictions and environment. Cancer can be prevented by making appropriate lifestyle changes. However, it is not easy to change the lifestyle of a community, but the importance of changes in lifestyle can be easily conveyed. Experience of the Western countries, has shown that information about cancer should be given as a matter of fact, as part of the science communication. It should not be a set of do's and don'ts. The message regarding cancer should be conveyed by means of educating youth. Knowledge about what is cancer should be given, and how does the growth in cancer cells differ from normal cell growth,

must be taught. Importance of public hygiene should be emphasized. Dental hygiene with reference to tobacco chewing as well as active and passive smoking must be highlighted. Importance of personal hygiene and genital hygiene should be taught with reference to sex education. Knowledge about balanced diet with information about harmful and protective substances in developing cancer or its prevention, is also required.

Moreover, the scientific basis of early diagnosis of cancer and principles of detection and treatment, should be taught. This puts the whole problem of cancer on a rational basis and a sense of optimism is developed towards the disease. Fear against cancer must be overcome by scientific knowledge and proper understanding of the disease. Teachers in a community can be instrumental in spreading scientific knowledge about cancer. Thus, teachers should be made aware about cancer and the potential to prevent and control this disease. They should then convey the knowledge to the youth community for a healthier world tomorrow.

Above all, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. The concept of prevention is age old and is an effective means of controlling infectious diseases. The preventive measures can be implemented easily against infectious diseases because their causative factors and mode of spread is known. One cannot be definite about the causes of cancer. But from certain addictions, familial conditions and dietary or reproductive habits, one can deduce statistical estimate of risk of being afflicted by the disease. Such risk factors can be avoided, but some of them are part of our lifestyle and hence need efforts to change. Fighting cancer is not just hoping to discover a 'magic bullet' to annihilate it. It is much broader a problem associated with early detection, curative measures, rehabilitation of the patient, psychological problems faced by patients and their care givers. Spreading authentic knowledge about cancer, is itself a step towards fighting cancer.

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