

Breast Cancer Survivorship for the Primary Care Physician

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Cancer Survivorship

- Begins at the time of diagnosis and continues throughout a person's life and can include those living with cancer and those free of cancer.
- Can include different phases: acute, remission, cure
- May include family, friends, and caregivers as they are also affected by the diagnosis
- The number of cancer survivors continues to increase due to early detection and better treatments and may reach 26.1 million by 2040.

Breast Cancer Survival

- There are more than 275,000 breast cancer diagnoses in the United States each year. Fortunately, new treatments have pushed the disease's five-year survival rate to 90%.
- 5 year survival rates:
 - About 96% for localized disease
 - About 85% for regional disease
 - About 30% for metastatic disease

Care of the Cancer Survivor

- Should include surveillance for cancer spread or recurrence, and screening for subsequent primary cancers
- Monitoring long-term effects of cancer, including psychosocial, physical, and immunologic effects
- Prevention and detection of late effects of cancer and therapy
- Evaluation and management of cancer-related syndromes, with appropriate referrals for targeted intervention
- Coordination of care between primary care providers and specialists to ensure that all of the survivor's health needs are met
- Planning for ongoing survivorship care

Survivorship Care Plans

- Good communication at the oncology/primary care interface may allow survivors to feel they have the continuity of care they desire. Some data suggest that treatment summaries and survivorship care plans lead to improvements in outcomes for survivors, such as having fewer emotional concerns and more often reporting that their needs have been met.
- Include information on treatment received (surgeries, radiation therapy, and systemic therapies)
- Information regarding follow-up care, surveillance, and screening recommendations
- Information on post-treatment needs, including information on acute, late, and long-term treatment-related side effects and health risks when possible
- Delineates the roles of all health care providers (including oncologists, primary care physicians, and subspecialists) in long-term survivorship care with coordinated timing of care and transfer of care as appropriate
- Promotion of adherence to healthy behavior recommendations
- Periodic assessment of ongoing needs and identification of appropriate resource

Role of the Primary Care Physician in Survivorship

- An impending shortage of oncology services as the number of survivors grows.
- Comorbidities in cancer survivors increases the mortality rate.
- Comorbidities can occur as a results of cancer treatment or as a late effect of cancer treatment
- Patients who received treatment from both their oncologist and their PCPs were more likely to receive more appropriate care for their other medical issues.
- Many primary care physicians feel that cancer survivorship should be a part of their practice but are unsure about how to care for cancer survivors.

Role of the Primary Care Physician in Survivorship

- Care providers are also encouraged to assess the following at regular intervals:
 - Current disease status
 - Functional/performance status
 - Medication use (including over-the-counter medications and supplements)
 - Comorbidities
 - Prior cancer treatment history and modalities used
 - Family history
 - Psychosocial factors
 - Weight and health behaviors that can modify cancer and comorbidity risk (including tobacco/alcohol use)
 - Fertility concerns for adults of childbearing potential
 - Review disease-specific recommendations for surveillance/follow-up

Risk of Subsequent Cancers

- The overall cancer rate in survivors is higher than in the general population due to genetic susceptibilities and/or family history, shared etiologic exposures (smoking, environmental exposures, health behaviors, HPV) and mutagenic effects of cancer treatment.

Cancer Screening Recommendations for Survivors

- Breast cancer
- Colorectal cancer
- Skin cancers
- CBCD

Late or Long-Term Effects of Breast Cancer Treatments

- A literature review suggests that at least 50% of survivors experience some late effects of cancer treatment. The most common problems in cancer survivors are depression, pain, and fatigue.
- Alkylating agents (cyclophosphamide) increased risk of hematologic malignancies and bladder cancers
- Tamoxifen increases the risk of uterine cancer in postmenopausal women
- CVD remains a leading cause of death in cancer survivors (anthracycline induced cardiotoxicity (doxorubicin), cardiomyopathy, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, cardiac arrhythmia, myocardial infarction)
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Osteopenia/osteoporosis
- Lymphedema
- Cognitive decline
- Fatigue

Psychosocial Well Being of Breast Cancer Survivors

- Anxiety (fear of recurrence, worry with screening) As many as 70% of post-treatment cancer survivors report high levels of fear of cancer recurrence, which can cause significant and enduring distress.
- Depression (body image)
- Sexual health (lack of desire, menopausal symptoms)
- Fertility-Pregnancy is considered safe and the hormonal environment associated with pregnancy is not thought to increase the risk of breast cancer recurrence. Prior breast cancer treatment does not increase the future risk of congenital malformations. General recommendations have traditionally been to wait until the survivor is disease free for 2 years before attempting to conceive, whether naturally or via assisted reproductive technologies, because of the higher risk of recurrence within that time.
- Trauma (nightmares/flashbacks, fear of needles)
- Substance abuse

Financial Difficulties

- Medical expenses due to treatment
 - About 25% spend most or all of their savings during cancer treatment
 - 10% have out of pocket costs >\$18,000
 - The LIVESTRONG 2012 Survey found that approximately 33% of working age survivors went into debt and 3% had filed for bankruptcy.
- More prevalent in patients with other comorbidities
- Difficulty returning to work

Modifiable Lifestyle Changes

- Health behaviors should be modified as possible to decrease the risk of subsequent malignancies
- Smoking cessation
- Moderate alcohol consumption
- Regular physical activity improves overall fitness as well as enhances emotional wellness and reduces fatigue
- Healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Maintain lean body weight
- Sun safety-sunscreen, covering exposed skin

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