Loneliness and Depression in Patients and Caregivers

Loneliness is a significant psychosocial concern for patients with cancer, and depression may be an antecedent to loneliness. To date, no studies have directly addressed the relationship of loneliness, depression, and social support among Turkish patients with cancer and their caregivers. The emotional responses that result from a cancer diagnosis vary and may include anxiety, anger, frustration, or depression. Because of the unexpected demands and emotions thrust on them, the caregivers of patients with cancer may be just as likely to experience loneliness or depression following a cancer diagnosis. As a result, this study sought to examine that relationship among a sample of 60 patients with cancer and 60 caregivers.

A cancer diagnosis is a traumatic event that has a significant impact on patients and their families and may cause responses of shock, uncertainty, hopelessness, anxiety, and depression (Nijboer, Triemstra, Tempelaar, Sanderman, & Van den Bos, 1999). Patients with cancer may experience a variety of life events that cause stress also are important contributors to loneliness. Loneliness causes a weakening in a person’s social status, impaired interpersonal relationships such as a those with family, friends, and relatives; an increase in negative behaviors; development of emotions such as distrustfulness and suspicion; and a reduction in self-trust. Loneliness causes stress and anxiety, which, in turn, engenders increased loneliness (Alkan & Sezgin, 1998).

Loneliness is one of the major psychosocial concerns for patients with cancer as many patients suffer from loneliness associated with illness or illness-related situations (Cuevas-Renaund, Sobrevilla-Calvo, & Almanza, 2000; Fox, Harper, Hyner, & Lyle, 1994; Perry, 1990). Loneliness is inversely related to the number of family and friends and the degree of satisfaction with them (Bondevik & Skogstad, 1998; Jylha & Jokela, 1990; Kim, 1999; Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1998).

Depression may be an antecedent to loneliness. Depression occurs frequently among patients with cancer, but often is underdiagnosed (Aapro & Cull, 1999; Spiegel & Davis, 2003). In addition, the presence of depression has a negative impact on quality of life, which interferes with the patient’s ability to cope as well as with evolution of the disease (Spiegel & Davis, 2003).