Surviving Cancer Recurrence
Coping with the First and Second

Claire C. Conley, M.A., and Barbara L. Andersen, Ph.D.
The Stress and Immunity Cancer Projects, Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University

Background

- The aim of the present study is to compare patients’ psychological responses to cancer diagnosis across time and type of cancer diagnosis.
- Cancer recurrence is defined as the return of cancer after treatment, after a period of time during which the cancer cannot be detected (ACS, 2013).
- Patients may have multiple recurrences. Second recurrence occurs after treatment, after a discrete period of time without cancer.
- Of the 230,000 annual cases of breast cancer, 20% will recur at least once.
- Differences between initial diagnosis and first recurrence include:
  - Lower functional status (Frost et al., 2000)
  - More fatigue (Frost et al., 2000; Sarenmalm et al., 2008)
  - More relationship problems (Northouse et al., 2005)
- There are no data examining psychological responses to a second recurrence.
- Data documenting patients’ psychological responses to initial, first recurrence, and second recurrence breast cancer diagnoses is needed.

Participants

Breast cancer patients (N=215) with initial disease (n=90), or a 1st (n=108) or 2nd recurrence (n=17) were assessed at diagnosis and 4 months later.

Outcome Measures

- Cancer Stress: Impact of Event Scale (IES)
- Mood: Profile of Mood States (POMS)
- Quality of Life (QoL; SF-36)
  - Physical Component Summary (PCS)
  - Mental Component Summary (MCS)
- Functional Status: Sexual Experience Scale (SEX)
- Sexual Satisfaction: Sexual Experience Scale (SEX)

Analytic Strategy

Linear regressions were used. Variables were entered in the following order:
1. Controls: age (years), receipt of surgery (yes/no)
2. Recurrence status (none, first, second)
3. Time (baseline, 4 months)
4. The interaction of recurrence status and time

Recurrence status significantly predicted lower SEX and lower KPS across time points (p<.01; see Figures 1 and 2).
Across time, SEX and KPS were:
- Highest for initial diagnosis patients (SEX: M=4.4, KPS: M=86).
- Middle for first recurrence patients (SEX: M=3.4, KPS: M=75).
- Lowest for second recurrence patients (SEX: M=3.0, KPS: M=73).

Results

Discussion & Implications

- No group differences were found for cancer stress, mood, or mental or physical quality of life.
- The only group difference found was lower sexual satisfaction and nurse rated performance status among second recurrence patients.
- Existing interventions to reduce stress and enhance coping might be applicable for all newly diagnosed patients.
- Alterations should be focused on the unique problem areas within a group.

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