

Depression in malnourished children with cancer

I Kiran, Q Atta-ur-Rehman

Department of Ancillary Health Services, Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Lahore, Pakistan

Background: Cancer is considered as the most feared of all the diseases. The stress of dealing with an illness like cancer can cause many uncomfortable feelings such as depression. Malnutrition and depression show close relationship with each other. Depression is closely associated with malnutrition.

Objective: To assess depression in malnourished cancer patients.

Setting: Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Center, Lahore-Pakistan.

Method: The sample of 46 admitted paediatric cancer patients in pediatric oncology ward of Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre. Thirty-six males and 10 females were assessed by a trained clinical psychologist and clinical nutritionist by using psychological assessment form. Nutrition assessment of children were based on weight for age with the help of growth charts (1).

Results: Of 46 malnourished pediatric cancer patients 37% (n = 17) were depressed. Malnourished patients were categorised into three categories on the basis of anthropometry, mildly malnourished, moderately and severely malnourished. The incidence of depression in mildly malnourished patients was 4% (n = 2), moderately and severely malnourished patients was 13% (n = 6) and 17% (n = 8) respectively.

Conclusion: This study shows that the depression is closely linked with the day by day deteriorating nutritional status in children with cancer.

1. Physical growth: National Centre for Health Statistics percentiles. Am J Clin Nutr 1979; 32: 607-629.