

Cancer and the Family

Researcher addresses emotional and psychological impact of breast cancer on families.

Date: May 01, 2009

Duration: 3:28

Transcript

There's a lot of distress going on and if you think in terms of stressors, cancer is a very, very big stressor. Of course there's all of this insecurity. What we know is that even in early cancer that today for example today early breast cancer that has been caught in its early stages is almost 100 percent curable. Yet even at the early stages there is always with cancer this fear of death, and the thought, "Is this going to kill me?" Especially at the diagnosis and early treatment stage, which is when I examine the couple, it's a very stressful time.

In this study we examine both the husband and wife. Some of the interesting findings, which there is some contradictory literature on, was that in our group the husbands are more distressed than the wives. If you look at anger, you look at depression, and you look at anxiety the husbands are doing worse than the wives. They're not the ones with cancer and yet they are more disturbed by these emotions than the women.

Some other findings were that her mood, her depression, was affected by a lot of his variables. So how he coped with the cancer, impacted her depression. How he appraised the cancer if he appraised the cancer as a threat, as something that was going to for sure take her life, she was more depressed. What we found as that when we tried to help these women with their mood these patients we need to focus on their partners because their partners have an impact on what these individuals moods are going to be.

If you noticed in the Race for the Cure, the survivors wear pink, and they get all dressed up kind of... it's very, very therapeutic. It's a way to find others that are like you. It's a way to reaffirm the fact that this something that you can survive and thrive from.

Years ago, many years ago, thankfully, in cancer was something that you even hid from others because it was like an embarrassment. And especially breast cancer because of its location, and yet nowadays women very strongly connect with their survivor role.

So when you see these women you get a sense of is this sisterhood. Women who say, "I know what you've been through. I know what it feels, and I can connect very well with you." So, yes, it's wonderful. Then they get all this support from other people that are there to support someone they love or just the movement in general.

If there's anything that people need to know is that if someone that you care for and that you feel close to has a situation like that, you really need to let them talk. You need to be open to having conversations that may be painful for you but be necessary for them so that they can express their needs.

A lot of these women in their writings to us would say, "I need to get my affairs in order. I need to talk about what's going to happen after I'm gone. But it's too painful for him, so we're not having these conversations." And that's really not fair to the person that's dying.