

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

What about me?

The distress and uncertainty of cancer and tips for coping

Englewood, New Jersey – With close to 1.5 million new cancer cases developing this year, health care clinicians are becoming increasingly aware of common distress levels in patients often caused by diagnosis and or treatment. Failure to recognize and treat distress leads to difficulty making treatment decisions, adhering to those decisions when made, and frequent office and emergency room visits, which placed greater burden on the oncology team.

Because distress symptoms do not go away on their own, mental health professionals like Dr. Michele Preminger, a board certified psychiatrist specializing in women's emotional health at The Rocking Chair, in Englewood, N.J., are expressing the importance of addressing and de-stigmatizing both cancer and psychological diagnoses.

"It's hard for cancer patients to voice their fears and anxiety and depressive symptoms because they are trying to stay strong for their family and friends," she said. "They often mask their symptoms with their medical care team because they do not want to appear weak or not trying their best.

"These patients often experience panic attacks or lose endless nights of sleep worrying about the "what ifs," said Preminger.

According to the NCCN Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology Distress Management (v.2.2009) © 2009 National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc., recent surveys have found that 20-40% of newly diagnosed and recurrent cancer patients show a significant level of distress while less than 10% of patients are actually identified and referred for psychological help.

Among those who have the most difficulty addressing their needs, said Dr. Preminger, are women who view their roles as caregivers or the backbone of the family unit.

She said, "Women, by nature, have a tendency to put themselves last on the priority list. At this very difficult time in a woman's life, she needs to know that it's crucial to address her emotional needs in order to optimize her treatment and healing. "

"Treating patients with a holistic approach is most helpful when coping with emotional stress and minimizes the need for additional medication", Dr. Preminger believes. The Rocking Chair offers a multidisciplinary approach to wellness and offers the following five treatment options in addition to psychiatric and psychological services:

- Yoga – personal fitness to the patients level of capability
- Creative Arts Therapy – using arts, including writing exercises, for expression
- Reflexology – a non-invasive method for stress and pain management
- Group counseling – universalizing experience and source of encouragement
- Caregiver support – relieving the “burden” patients feel they place on others

By explaining how healthcare professionals use to handle emotional health, Dr. Preminger believes the old rules no longer apply. “In the past doctors might have assumed, ‘Of course she is sad, she has cancer’ and did not address symptoms of anxiety and depression. That is no longer acceptable. Addressing emotional wellbeing and distress should be an integral part of the treatment plan for any cancer patient.”

Calling further for the recognition that most patients require further care than ambulatory services Dr. Preminger said, “Whether it’s being called distress management or putting a warm blanket of support around a patient, addressing emotional issues should be the norm rather than the exception.”

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