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First published on March 18, 2008

Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing 2008, doi:10.1177/1043454208315547
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Article

I'll Show Them: The Social Construction of (In) Competence in Survivors of Childhood Brain Tumors

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Abstract

Multimodal therapy for the treatment of childhood cancer has resulted in increased survival rates, yet as growing cohorts of children mature, late effects are becoming apparent. Specifically, brain tumor survivors tend to have poor social skills, peer relationship problems, academic difficulties, and delayed college entry. This article addresses findings specific to the unique experience of childhood cancer survivors as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Qualitative methods involving focus groups and in-depth interviews with 14 childhood cancer survivors and 22 family members were used. The dialectic of incompetence/competence pervaded all narratives. Contradictory concepts of integration/isolation, realistic/unrealistic goals, and the need for special help/no help were underscored by respondents. The struggle to deal with these contradictory factors led to the simultaneous resistance and acceptance of feelings of competence.

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