Parent-child communication and psychological adjustment in children with a brain tumor.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Internalizing problems, anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and consequent social problems are frequently observed in children with brain tumors. The objective of this work is to describe the relationship between these psychological problems and the type of parent-child communication established about the disease.

PROCEDURES: A group of 64 children surviving a brain tumor (aged 4-18 years) underwent psychological assessment by means of parent reports on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS). A semi-structured interview with each child and their parents enabled us to classify the method of communication regarding the disease as "avoidance," "ineffective," and "effective." Demographic, clinical, and functional data relating to the disease were also collected.

RESULTS: A significant relationship between the onset of Internalizing problems, withdrawal, anxiety-depression, and social problems and the presence of avoidance or ineffective communication about the disease was observed (P = 0.001, P = 0.001, P = 0.001, and P = 0.01, respectively). These psychological problems did not prove to be associated to demographic or clinical variables; however, they were found to be related to the children's residual functional problems. By contrast, the method of communication proved to be unrelated to clinical or functional variables, but it was associated to demographic variables such as sex and age at assessment.

CONCLUSIONS: Effective (complete, truthful, consistent, comprehensible, gradual and continuous, and tailored) communication to the child about his/her condition proved to be associated with a better psychological outcome. Pediatr Blood Cancer © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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