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Psychological Outcomes in Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors

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Abstract

The diagnosis of cancer during adolescent and young adulthood (AYA) may alter the development and psychological trajectory of survivors across their lifespan. The current review focuses broadly on emotional health, social functioning, health behaviors, and cancer-related cognitive impairment (CRCI) among AYA survivors. Overall, AYA survivors appear to be at elevated risk of emotional distress symptoms, mood and anxiety disorders, suicide, and mental health care service utilization compared with individuals without a cancer history. Difficulties with social relationships and reduced achievement of expected social outcomes including educational attainment and employment have been reported. Despite risk for health-related morbidities, including subsequent neoplasms, many AYA survivors do not engage in health behaviors at the recommended levels for physical activity, diet, or tobacco and alcohol use. Although CRCI has not been comprehensively characterized in this population, subgroups of AYA survivors appear to be at risk for experiencing CRCI, including survivors of central nervous system tumors, Hodgkin lymphoma, testicular, and breast cancer. Across each considered domain of psychological functioning, intervention efforts have largely focused on acceptability and feasibility with an increasing focus on e/mHealth approaches. Future research should include multiphase studies, including randomized controlled trials designed to evaluate intervention efficacy and effectiveness. It is imperative that psychological interventions consider the unique needs of AYA survivors by developmental stage and across multiple levels of influence (patient, support system, institution, and health care system).

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