

Survivorship-what do we mean and what might we achieve?

DR SIMON G. ALLAN
CO-CLINICAL DIRECTOR CCN
PALLIATIVE CARE PHYSICIAN AND MEDICAL
ONCOLOGIST



Glass half full or empty



Optimism

- 93% of people surveyed believed they were in the top 50 percentile for driving ability
- 0% median assessment of US marriage-license applicants of the likelihood of divorce
- 10% of US people surveyed think they will live to 100-actual is 0.02%
- We think and plan ahead, we are creature of hope
- We are largely creatures who are half full!

Tali Sharot-The Optimism Bias

- Planning ahead allows us to save resources for hard times
- We endure hard work to save up for reward later
- The price we pay for being able to be cognisant time travelers is that we have to face the understanding that somewhere in the future we will die. When disease strikes we are more vulnerable to these thoughts.

Questions, so many questions!

- [When am I considered a cancer survivor?](#)
- [What should my medical follow-up be once my cancer treatment is finished?](#)
- [What is a survivorship care plan?](#)
- [What types of follow-up tests might I need?](#)
- [Where can I learn more about cancer recurrence?](#)
- [What are the signs that the cancer might be returning?](#)
- [Am I at risk for a new cancer?](#)
- [What actions can I take to minimize my risk for a new cancer?](#)
- [What about my family-do they have a risk?](#)
- [Where can I find information about health insurance issues for cancer survivors?](#)
- [Where can I find information about workplace issues for cancer survivors?](#)

Defining survivorship

Surviving cancer or "survivorship" can be defined in different ways. Two common definitions include:

- Having no disease after the completion of treatment,
- The process of living with, through, and beyond cancer. By this definition, cancer survivorship begins at diagnosis. It includes people who continue to have treatment to either reduce risk of recurrence or to manage chronic disease.

Sometimes, doctors use terms to describe the specific period a survivor is experiencing. These can include:

- Acute survivorship: describes the time when a person is being diagnosed and/or in treatment for cancer.
- Extended survivorship: describes the time immediately after treatment is completed
- Permanent survivorship: describes a longer-term period, often meaning that the passage of time since treatment is measured in years.

Survivorship Phases



Acute Survivorship

- At the pre-diagnosis, diagnosis and throughout treatment
- Communication needs
- Anxiety/depression
- Physical need
- Psychological/social/spiritual need
- Life style challenge
- Family/whanau needs

Transitional phase

- When on treatment a psychological dependence can develop
- "Post treatment dump"!
- More of "me" and my/family resources needed to get on with life
- Facing changes in body image, existential challenge, sexual intimacy
- Previous rifts in family can be accentuated and separation forced
- Work can be different, no insurance reminds you of the cancer and its effects across all of life

Remission Phase

- An Oncology term picked up by patients and part of the fearful talk that is cancer speak!
- Remission can be complete or partial
- Remission can indicate cure but only after the passage of a length of time
- Remember that every cancer is different and often great differences between them
- Am I then living with cancer or without cancer? Why the heck can't they tell me?

Cure with no consequences

- Great situation!
- Cancer came, was treated, I am well in myself and able to continue life as usual, it stayed away and I have no future risk attending me because of that cancer incident
- There are a lot more people like this around than you would realise because they are well and getting on with their lives

Cure with consequences

- Genetic-I may have a high chance of passing a gene to my children
- Life style- I want my family/whanau and “the world” to change and pay attention to what I want to warn them about!
- I may be prone to a second cancer
- I may be prone to another disease after this cancer-increasing knowledge on this
- I can't shake off the ghost of the cancer

Cure with consequences

- Sexual and reproductive issues
- Growth, development and behavioural issues
- Early menopause
- Early bone aging
- Hearing loss
- Organ damage
- Early heart disease
- Earlier smoking related disease
- Etc.....and disease/treatment specific

Survivorship-to ponder!

- What focus should there be on survivorship during the active diagnosis and treatment phase?
- What needs to be in place at discharge from treatment to support me in this transition phase?
- How do we get people linked back into appropriate services for ongoing support in the longer term?
- How can existing programmes relating to survivorship be further developed and promoted?
- Who is responsible for my survivorship plan?

Survivors voices

- “How long am I a survivor? As long as I am alive I AM a survivor!”
- “Hold tightly to the things you love and get rid of the rest!”
- “I have learned that to be healthy is to live with the health which my body has allowed me.”
- “It took me a long time to realise that this was a new life for me to live-a new normal.”

Survivorship

- What a great topic to be discussing!
- Today you can express your needs as survivors and health professionals
- We will have opportunity to workshop some ideas and stimulate appropriate action to be picked up by Health providers, agencies and the Cancer Society
- Despite our constrained times we can better organise our health care system to improve living well with and beyond cancer

