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Long-term Cancer Survivorship: Prevalence of Comorbid Diseases and Influence on Psychosocial Outcomes

Cancer survivors who report having two or more disease comorbidities (e.g. hypertension, arthritis, stroke, heart disease), in addition to their cancer, were significantly more likely to report symptoms of depression and a lower quality of life, than those without comorbid disease.

New Orleans, LA - Survivors of cancer represent a growing population who are at increased risk of recurrence, comorbid disease, and late or long-term effects of treatment. This burden can exacerbate psychological distress, and impair quality of life, while simultaneously requiring increased levels of personal coping and symptom management.

“As survival rates for many common cancers have increased, we have intensified our focus on the long-term health and well-being of survivors. Advances in this critical area of research and clinical practice are needed to enhance our understanding of survivor’s needs, and to ensure that we are able to provide ongoing care that optimizes health outcomes and quality of life,” said Errol Philip, PhD, who is presenting with Drs. Merluzzi, Heitzmann and Driscoll.

Their findings, based on the responses of over three hundred survivors, suggest significant comorbidity in this growing population. Moreover, greater disease burden was associated with impaired quality of life and symptoms of depression.

The authors of the study acknowledge that while these are preliminary results, it is important to recognize that cancer survivors may be managing significant disease comorbidity, and that this may be associated with adverse quality of life outcomes. They urge health professionals who care for survivors to be vigilant in monitoring those managing multiple comorbid conditions, and for supportive interventions to be offered to those identified to be at risk.

The presentation of this research will take place on Wednesday April 11 (6:30pm- 8:00pm CST), at the Society of Behavioral Medicine’s 33rd Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions, New Orleans, LA

Dr. Philip is a Clinical Research Fellow in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Dr. Merluzzi is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame

Dr. Heitzmann is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Delaware Counseling Center

Dr. Driscoll is a Health Psychology Fellow at the VA Connecticut Healthcare System.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine is a multidisciplinary organization of clinicians, educators, and scientists dedicated to promoting the study of the interactions of behavior with biology and the environment and the application of that knowledge to improve the health and well being of individuals, families, communities, and populations. www.sbm.org

This study was presented during the 2012 Annual Meeting and Scientific Session of the Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) from April 11-14 in New Orleans, LA. However, it does not reflect the policies or the opinion of the SBM.

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