Assessing Suicidal Ideation and Behaviors Among Survivors of Childhood Brain Tumors and Their Mothers During Sociobehavioral Research

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Suicidal ideation and behavior assessments have been studied in many different cancer populations at diagnosis and during therapy (Anguiano, Mayer, Piven, & Rosenstein, 2012; Bjorkenstam, Edberg, Ayoubi, & Rosen, 2005; Filiberti & Ripamonti, 2002; Hem, Loge, Haldorsen, & Ekeberg, 2004). However, they have been studied less frequently in pediatric populations and long-term survivors of cancer (Recklitis et al., 2010), including survivors of childhood brain tumors (Brinkman et al., 2013). Compared to survivors of other childhood cancers, survivors of childhood brain tumors have an increased risk of suicidal ideation (Recklitis et al., 2010). Comparable rates (12%) of suicidal ideation were found in a separate sample of adult survivors of childhood brain tumors (Brinkman et al., 2013). These rates are higher than the 12-month suicidal ideation prevalence in adults (4%) in the general population of the United States (Crosby, Han, Ortega, Parks, & Gfroerer, 2011).

Several submissions to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) demonstrated significant variation in the methods used to report suicidal thoughts and behaviors during traditional interviews by clinicians supervising antidepressant clinical trials. These findings challenge the validity of the clinical interview as the gold standard for the assessment of suicidal ideation in the clinical trial setting. The presence of variations in reporting methods supported the need to improve the evaluation of suicidal thoughts to detect small fluctuations that may be related to treatment efforts (Posner et al., 2011; Zimmerman, Chemlinski, & Posternak, 2004, 2005). Suicidal ideation was reported in clinical trials of pharmaceuticals that were not being tested for the treatment of psychiatric disorders. To prevent this untoward event, effective assessment was merited (FDA, 2012).

The specific assessment of suicidal ideation and behavior during the course of research was not required.