Impact of Survivorship Care on Young Adult Survivors of Childhood Cancer With Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms


Survivors of childhood cancer may be psychologically affected by the cancer experience throughout life (Brinkman, Recklitis, Michel, Grootenhuis, & Klosky, 2018). Potential outcomes they are at risk for include post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSSs), such as avoidance or numbing (e.g., avoiding event-related stimuli), hyperarousal (e.g., hypervigilance), and re-experiencing (e.g., intrusive memories) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Even a patient who does not meet diagnostic criteria for full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can exhibit PTSSs, which may impair daily functioning. Although PTSSs have been identified in childhood cancer survivors (Koutná, Jelinek, Blatný, & Kepák, 2017; Stuber et al., 2010), PTSSs have not been examined specifically in young adult survivors who have not received survivorship care since completing treatment. PTSSs may stem from the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, which is recognized as a potentially traumatic event (APA, 2013), and ongoing exposures to other potential traumas (e.g., surgeries, hospitalizations, deaths of other children) inherent in the cancer experience (Allen et al., 2018; Stuber, Kazak, Meeske, & Barakat, 1998). The emergence of such symptoms aligns with a pediatric medical traumatic stress model, which proposes that the experience of medical illness can cause physiologic or psychological effects (Price, Kassam-Adams, Alderfer, Christofferson, & Kazak, 2016).

Background

PTSSs are associated with other psychological outcomes (e.g., depression), impaired social functioning, poor quality of life, and long-term physical health decline (Ahmadi et al., 2018; Boccarino, 2004; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, Monahan, & Löwe, 2007; Meeske, Rucione, Globe, & Stuber, 2001). Among individuals with medical-related trauma (e.g., intensive care stay),