Integrative Literature Review on Psychological Distress and Coping Strategies Among Survivors of Adolescent Cancer

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Advances in cancer treatment have increased the overall five-year survival rate to almost 85% (Howlader et al., 2020). However, cancer remains the second leading cause of death for children and adolescents (Howlader et al., 2020). About 5,000–6,000 adolescents aged 15–19 years are diagnosed with cancer annually, and about 500–600 adolescents die from cancer each year (American Cancer Society, 2020). Adolescents are aware of these mortality statistics, and they experience fear and anxiety about their chance of surviving the disease, according to national survey data (Hølge-Hazelton et al., 2016). Because adolescence is a time of dramatic growth in various domains, including physical, cognitive, psychological, and social (Smith et al., 2013), adolescents with cancer face unique challenges in coping with life-threatening illness. Navigating the typical changes of adolescence is difficult; adding cancer-related psychological distress, powerlessness, and insecurity about the future places a heavy demand on teenagers’ coping skills (Ander et al., 2018). To effectively manage stressors, patients with cancer need to learn and employ personal coping strategies, including leaning on others for social support.

Coping is defined as a dynamic process of making cognitive and behavioral choices to reduce stress during cancer treatment; this definition is based on a framework by Folkman and Lazarus (1988). Coping mediates the impact of stressors on physical health and encourages the psychological adjustment that takes place after a cancer diagnosis (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). During the coping process, primary and secondary appraisals occur. Primary appraisals involve developing strategies to directly change the source of the stress using problem-focused or...