



Veterans and Bladder Cancer webinar

Tuesday March 1, 2016

Part II: Common Psychological Issues

Presented by



Jennifer Dimick, LISW-S, OSW-C is an outpatient social worker with the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, working in the department of hematology/oncology. She also specializes in qualitative and quantitative social research as well as social and health psychology.



Veterans are different group of people who are part of our population – they are our protectors. So when they are diagnosed with a cancer, this can make them feel that they aren't now the protector that they were before, a little “ding” in their armor, and anger can result from this. Many veterans have expressed anger toward the government about being drafted into a war, or our Marines and their families at Camp Lejeune having been exposed to toxins because of the government.

When you have been diagnosed with cancer, and are dealing with anger, that can interfere with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Sometimes with anger and irritability, you don't have the coping mechanisms to be able to wait for appointments, or it's not scheduled at the right time. That can interfere with the diagnostic screening or even the treatment of the cancer. It can also cause problems within a family—the relationship with spouse or significant

Mental Health | Cancer & Anger

- Veterans are protectors
 - Of our country
 - Of our families
- How could the government expose me and/or my family to toxins?
 - In times of war
 - Camp Lejeune Water Crisis



Impact of Anger


- Anger can:
- interfere with diagnosis and treatment of bladder cancer.
 - cause relationship discord as a result of lack of communication.
 - be an ineffective way of coping with the uncertainty or worry of bladder cancer treatment.



other. You may suppress your anger – not talk about it – and cause discord between you and your loved one. Anger is an ineffective coping skill, but it is something that everyone deals with. It’s a valid emotion, but not an effective way to deal with the uncertainty of bladder cancer.

Effects of PTSD & Mental Health Issues

- PTSD symptoms can increase during cancer treatment.
- Substance abuse is used as coping with anger.
- Mental health issues such as depression or anxiety may increase.



We have ways to help with those sorts of feelings. There are studies on the effects of cancer of people with PTSD – the studies are showing that the symptoms of PTSD can *increase* during cancer treatment. So we are finding that veterans are experiencing more nightmares and anxiety when they have to go into cancer treatment. Certainly, we have some veterans who have issues with substance abuse and when they have difficulties with the anger that they are feeling about the cancer diagnosis that can lead to an increase in substances abuse, as well as depression and anxiety.

One way to help cope with a cancer diagnosis is becoming educated and better informed about the cancer and the diagnosis itself. Tune in to BCAN at www.bcan.org and view the webinars. This is a good way to get started to learn and link up with others who are also going through it. That makes the “what-ifs” of your treatment plan less threatening, because you know in advance what can happen. Having your family and friends around you as you go through the treatment is also a good way of getting support. Have your family or a family member come with you to appointments. It is always a good idea to have another person be there with you who can also listen so you can go over everything with them after the appointment.


Effective Coping Strategies

- Education on bladder cancer
 - Knowing your treatment plan makes the “what if’s” less threatening
- Seek supportive family/friends
- Talk with your healthcare team

You can talk to your healthcare team and get information from them. There’s a wide variety of people within oncology who can help – oncologists, nurse practitioners, nurses, psychologists, and psychiatrists all who specialize in cancer, and of course social workers also. You can always for a referral to the social worker or mental health provider so we can connect you with services you may need as you go through treatment. I always recommend to anyone who is going through treatment, a power of attorney for health care and a living will. That is the way for you to put your medical wishes on paper, so your doctors know what kind of treatment to use in the future if you are not able to tell them.

Effective Coping Strategies

- Education on bladder cancer
 - Knowing your treatment plan makes the “what if’s” less threatening
- Seek supportive family/friends
- Talk with your healthcare team
- Ask for a referral to the Social Worker or a Mental Health provider
- Complete a Power of Attorney for Healthcare and Living Will



VA Resources

- Multidisciplinary teams can coordinate care
 - Often from within same building or center
- The VA has a centralized record system
 - Your records will go with you if you ever relocate
 - Multiple teams can communicate more easily
- Many VA centers are staffed by leading experts affiliated with major research universities



At the VA, we have the multidisciplinary team that I just referred to that coordinates cancer treatment, in addition to patient navigators – there's a variety of people who can help. We have a centralized record system. Our medical record system can be viewed at other VA locations around the country, so if you wanted to relocate, your records would be available where you go. We help with setting up appointments in your new location so that makes the relocation and transition to a new VA easier. Our VA centers are staffed by experts who are affiliated with major research universities, like Dr. Taylor here is with Baylor. Here in Cleveland, we're affiliated with Case Western Reserve. So we have expert doctors, nurses and social workers, all from major universities.

Another important resource we have is smoking cessation programs – whether it's replacement products or support groups. Our psychologists are trained in smoking cessation so if you want to quit smoking, put in a request to your healthcare team and they can arrange for you to meet with someone in the area of smoking cessation. There's also nutrition consultation - there's always a nutritionist on staff, before or after surgery, or certainly during chemotherapy.

Other VA Resources

- SMOKING CESSATION
- Support groups
 - For patients, survivors, caregivers
- Nutrition consultation
 - Before and after surgery
 - If receiving chemotherapy

Smoking Cessation

- Quitting smoking **NOW** improves your bladder cancer recurrence risk and survival.
- Check at your local VA for programs.
- <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/smoking/>
 - 1-855-QUIT-VET
 - SmokefreeVET: mobile text message service
 - Text "VET" to 47848
 - <http://smokefree.gov/vet>



We have other types of support groups – caregivers support, PTSD support, and cancer support. And just ask your oncology team to speak with a social worker to find the support group or groups that would be helpful to you.