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Beyond medical treatment - addressing the psychosocial needs of cancer patients and their family caregivers

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ABSTRACT

Cancer affects not just the body, but also the mental health of cancer patients and their informal caregivers, such as family members. Psycho-oncology is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the psychological, emotional and social aspects of cancer care from diagnosis to end-of-life. In this presentation, I will give a brief overview of the field of psycho-oncology, identify key areas of research and present some of my own research in the field which have been carried out with the International Psycho-Oncology Society (IPOS) and with my research group at the Danish Cancer Institute. This includes a global review of psychosocial care for cancer survivors in national cancer control plans (NCCP), an international survey of psychosocial care in low/middle- and high-income countries identifying facilitators and barriers, and two clinical trials testing psychological interventions: 1) the Resilient Caregivers randomized trial testing a group intervention aimed at reducing anxiety among spousal cancer caregivers (Clinicaltrials.gov identifier: NCT04610034), and 2) the SOFUS feasibility trial testing a supportive intervention in families of children in pediatric palliative care (Clinicaltrials.gov ID: NCT04883151). Addressing the psychosocial needs of cancer patients and their families should be an integral part of comprehensive cancer care and ongoing efforts are needed to improve support for those affected by cancer and ensure access to these services.

Keywords: Psycho-oncology, psychosocial care, unmet needs, cancer caregivers, cancer survivorship