Article Series Understanding Cancer Multiple Myeloma

Emotional wellbeing and multiple myeloma

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Cancer, including multiple myeloma, can impact people’s psychological well-being (how they feel emotionally), which may be due to the shock of receiving their diagnosis or as a side effect of certain treatments. It is important to identify and try to reduce negative feelings (sadness, anxiety or depression), because these feelings can affect how well you respond to treatment and relationships with your friends and family.

Here are descriptions of some of the terms used which you may find helpful:

- ***Mental health:*** *this refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how they think, feel, and act. It also helps to determine how they handle stress, how they relate to others, and how they make choices*
- ***Psychological burden:*** *this is used here to describe all of the negative effects that multiple myeloma can have on a person's mental health. 'Psychological' refers to a person's mind or thoughts, and 'burden' refers to the difficulty or worry caused by something*

1. **Psychological burden of multiple myeloma**

People living with multiple myeloma can often feel sad, distressed, lonely, and anxious at any stage of their illness. Reasons can be because they feel unsure about what their diagnosis means, there have been changes to their treatment, or because their cancer has come back after being told that their disease was under control.

It is important to know that these symptoms can appear as feelings of worry, fear, or sadness, having problems concentrating, trouble sleeping, trembling or shaking, a dry mouth, feeling irritated or angry, or feeling sick. These feelings can be increased if you aren't able to work or have financial worries, or if you are unable to exercise as much as you previously could. These feelings can often affect relationships with friends and family.

Social occasions such as birthdays or holidays can be particularly difficult, and someone living with multiple myeloma may experience a wide range of strong emotions. Some of the techniques below such as rest and talking to friends or family may help someone living with multiple myeloma cope with these emotions.

2. **Tips for reducing psychological burden**

Your emotional and mental health can be affected at any point following a multiple myeloma diagnosis, and it's completely normal to feel angry, sad, or frustrated. Listed below are some ways that can help with these feelings.

- **Communication**

Talking to your healthcare team can help you understand what a diagnosis of multiple myeloma means for you, and they can provide guidance on the benefits and risks of each treatment option. You can also talk to friends and family, or multiple myeloma support groups about how you are feeling. If however, you find it difficult to express your feelings to your loved ones, a more effective way of communicating may be through talking to an oncology social worker, counsellor, or member of the clergy. Caregivers can be a particularly important source of encouragement and support.

- **Self-care and mental wellbeing**

Taking time to look after yourself is important, especially when you're feeling stressed, anxious, or lonely. This could include continuing or taking up hobbies or activities that you enjoy, exercise, or relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, or hypnosis. Having a routine that involves both work and social activities can help people with multiple myeloma cope with feelings of loneliness.

- **Therapies**

If you are still struggling with stress after trying the above techniques, then your healthcare team can help you in other ways. They can prescribe treatments to help reduce how stressed you are feeling, or they can put you in contact with mental health professionals who can help you deal with stressful situations.

- **Other helpful resources**

There are a number of helpful resources available to you such as patient websites, local multiple myeloma support groups, or pieces written by people living with multiple myeloma.

If you are experiencing episodes of intense anxiety, depression and distress, this can make some of the symptoms of multiple myeloma worse. It is therefore important that you communicate with your healthcare team about your emotional state, in the same way as you do about your physical state, so they can refer you to other services or support which you may find helpful.