

## Psychological Distress in Cancer Patients

Distress is an unpleasant feeling that may interfere with one's ability to cope with cancer, its physical symptoms and its treatment. Since distress is a normal reaction to cancer, many patients take it for granted, and may not be aware that greater distress affects their daily functions and quality of life.

Symptoms of mild distress include fear, worry, and uncertainty about the future. Cancer patients' concerns about the illness and side effects of its treatment may cause their quality of sleep and appetite to become worse.

There are some strategies to help patients cope with distress. They can find someone to talk with them about their illness; use distraction methods such as deep breathing and relaxation exercises; obtain help through support or self-help groups, and seek advice from healthcare professionals.

If patients are not aware of mild distress, the situation can become worse and turn into severe distress. Patients may have excessive worries and fears, and feel sad most of the time. Despair and hopelessness are also symptoms of severe distress. Due to their inability to communicate with family members, patients may also have severe family problems, sometimes leading to a breakdown of marital relationships.

Therefore, reporting distress to the healthcare professionals is very important. Healthcare professionals could assess its etiology, and help patients to cope with it. Support from their family is also essential to help patients going through the whole process of cancer treatment. They can express their care and love, act as good listeners, accompany the patient for the treatment and provide tangible support, such as taking care of the children, attending to household duties and preparing meals.