



Social Connection Benefits for Cancer Survival



Hot off the press, courtesy of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, is a study entitled, *Marital Status and Survival in Patients With Cancer* (Aizer et al). The research, which included more than one million patients, highlights **the potentially significant impact that social support can have on cancer detection, treatment, and survival.**

Though some researchers had expected such findings, others were surprised by the findings that found "unmarried patients are at significantly higher risk of presentation with metastatic cancer, undertreatment, and death resulting from their cancer."

In very clear terms, patients who are married are: 1) more likely to undergo surgical and/or radiotherapeutic management than unmarried patients, 2) are significantly less likely to die of their disease, and 3) are more likely to be treated than their unmarried counterparts.

The study found the survival benefit associated with marriage was larger than the published survival benefit of chemotherapy!

You can also see, hear and read *Married Cancer Patients are 20% More Likely to Beat the Disease*, which talks about these findings, and was featured earlier this week on NBC Evening News.

But all is not lost for those of us who are single, separated, divorced or widowed! The study's results raise a strong probability that investments in targeted social support interventions could significantly improve the likelihood of improving outcomes among unmarried patients with cancer. **The researchers say, "the most effective way to combat the included risks associated with unmarried status in patients with cancer would be to aggressively promote support mechanisms."**

In his review of and comments on this research entitled, *Marriage Is As Protective As Chemotherapy in Cancer Care*, Dr. David W. Kissane, of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and Weill Cornell Medical College, discusses the challenge of getting single, disconnected people to join support groups, especially after a diagnosis. Clinical depression often results from a cancer diagnosis.



The public's mantra must be to help people get more and more connected, and to encourage and push

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personal safety nets as part of their philosophy and service - so all can have an equal, better and more long-lasting life. ~~Let's all spread the word!~~ Dr. Kissane recommends communication skills training as well as more and better support services on the part of oncologists, hospitals and public health agencies. But maybe his best approach is to espouse ideas central to building a personal safety net: ". . . ***we are tribal people, drawn into connection with one another to share what is most meaningful and fulfilling in life. Or medicine needs to follow a parallel paradigm: healing care that is both person - and family - centered in its expression.***" (We're also adding "community" centered to Dr. Kissane's thoughts.)

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