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“Mental Health Challenges in Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors: A Review of Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Existing Interventions”

Background: Adolescents and young adults (AYAs) diagnosed with cancer are at an increased risk for developing mental health issues. It is important for healthcare practitioners to understand the extent and impact that mental health issues have for AYAs with cancer so they can implement intervention strategies that are effective at improving quality of life. This literature review assesses the prevalence of mental health conditions in AYA cancer survivors, defines key risk factors, and evaluates existing mental health interventions and their effectiveness.

Methods: A literature search was completed to identify studies that discuss mental health-related issues in AYAs diagnosed with cancer. Inclusion criteria required studies that focused on AYAs diagnosed with cancer and assessed their mental health outcomes at a minimum of five years post-diagnosis.

Results: Findings suggest that AYAs with cancer are at higher risk for developing mental health issues compared to their healthy peers. A meta-analysis of selected studies revealed pooled prevalence rates of 32% for general psychological distress, 29% for anxiety, and 24% for depression. Associated risk factors in this patient population include long-term treatment-related complications, gender, and age. Studies demonstrated that AYA cancer survivors may benefit from engaging in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and structured peer support programs. Comprehensive access to specialized mental health services as standardized care for cancer patients remains inconsistent, with many AYA survivors describing unmet needs regarding their mental health.

Conclusions: Mental health issues are prevalent in the AYA cancer population. Gaps in standardized intervention strategies persist in healthcare. The existing literature illustrates limited understanding of how mental health challenges in cancer care can evolve long-term after treatment due to inconsistent follow-up with patients. Future studies could prioritize evidence-based interventions for AYA cancer patients.

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