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The Beneficial Effects of Social Support During Cancer



This article explores and describes the association between social support perceived by children and young people diagnosed with cancer, and health-related quality of life once they overcome the oncological illness. Results showed how social support, specifically the emotional support provided by nursing staff, promoted health-related quality of life at mid/long-term. Also, those who had actively sought social support were precisely those that showed better health-related quality of life at cancer remission.

Social support is a protective factor for health that is widely recognized in the scientific literature. When speaking of social support, we refer not only to that intended to cover emotional needs in difficult or stressful situations, but to support that involves giving information on the disease or treatment, or support that helps to manage everyday life and routines, which can be disrupted by different stressful life events.

When children are diagnosed with cancer, their primary source of social support is their parents and closest relatives (e.g. siblings, cousins, grandparents, etc.) who act as main caregivers. However, mid/long-term hospitalizations or frequent visits to the hospital are necessary to implement different treatment modalities and protocols. Therefore, the medical staff becomes part of the social environment of the child and usually ends up being a source of support.

In our study, perceived social support was assessed in a sample of children diagnosed with cancer and, additionally, it was explored if this support was related to health-related quality of life once the cancer entered into remission and they became survivors.

The results showed that although parents were the main source of support for these pediatric patients, the medical staff was a relevant source of social support too. Moreover, the survivors with better health-related quality of life were those who, precisely, in the worst moments of their hospitalization, received emotional support from the nursing staff and were specially focused on seeking social support.

In light of these results, we think it is justified to promote and strengthen social support from family members and medical staff to pediatric patients admitted to oncology and hematology units, since this could have a positive and lasting effect in the cancer survival period.

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References

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