



Needs of Teenage Patients

Coping with Overwhelming Stress

One of the challenges that teenagers encounter during their growth is the pursuit of independence. They no longer simply follow their parents' instructions like young children; instead, they are striving to become self-reliant and autonomous. Being diagnosed with cancer often leaves teenage patients feeling lost and uncertain. While they may possess the cognitive ability to comprehend a significant amount of information and understand the various consequences of their illness, they may lack the emotional maturity required to cope with the numerous shocks and fears that accompany it. At times, they are expected to exhibit the strength of adults in order to endure the discomfort caused by treatments. On other occasions, they are treated as children, not being informed about the treatment's efficacy or included in the decision-making process. Standing at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, it is natural for teenagers to feel bewildered and unsure of what to do.

Establishing individual needs

"Who am I?" This is a question that resonates with most teenagers as they navigate their journey of self-discovery. Peer recognition holds significant importance to them. However, when faced with illnesses and the subsequent physical changes brought about by treatments, teenagers may experience heightened anxiety and a sense of isolation. These changes can also disrupt their plans for the future, including academic pursuits, career aspirations, and romantic relationships, leading to a sense of uncertainty. Nevertheless, teenagers yearn for acceptance and hope that those close to them will see them as they were before their illness, treating them with the same regard and respect.

Despite the numerous challenges they encounter, many teenagers and their families have expressed that their experience with cancer has granted them a newfound perspective on life. They have developed stronger bonds with their family members, exhibiting resilience, empathy toward others, and an enhanced appreciation for their own lives.

Advice for caregivers

1. When caring for a teenager, it is essential to analyse their treatment progress in a respectful manner and listen attentively to their needs. By doing so, you can create an environment where they feel fully engaged in their own treatment and decision-making processes.

2. Encourage teenagers to keep learning, continue pursuing their hobbies, and stay in touch with their friends. Encourage them to make new friends while in the ward and participate in various activities, allowing them to maintain a sense of normalcy.
3. Encourage teenagers to set short-term goals. This will give them something to look forward to beyond being admitted to and discharged from the hospital.
4. Respect teenagers' opinions. Sometimes, the issues that bother teenagers may seem insignificant or trivial to adults. However, what they seek in those moments is validation, not instruction.
5. Teenagers may exhibit emotional responses under stress, such as tantrums, agitation, depression, or anxiety, and may display regressive behaviour. It is normal if these behaviours are temporary and transitional.
6. Allow teenagers to have their own space, where they can mind their own business without worrying about others. Alternatively, encourage them to express themselves through different means. For example, they can share their worries with trusted individuals. It is not necessary for you to solve everything. If they choose to temporarily keep their worries hidden, parents should respect their need for personal space and let them decide when and with whom to share their concerns.