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Editorial

Transforming Cancer Care through Physical Exercise: A Path to Holistic Healing

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Editorial

The role of physical exercise in cancer treatment is gaining increasing recognition as part of a holistic approach to patient care. Traditionally, cancer treatment has focused on surgical, hormonal, chemotherapeutic, as well as radiotherapeutic interventions. However, recent studies underscore the significant benefits of integrating physical exercise into treatment plans, not merely as a supplementary activity but as a core component of cancer care [1].

Physical exercise as a therapeutic modality

Exercise is emerging as a powerful therapeutic modality with multifaceted benefits for cancer patients. Beyond improving muscle strength and cardiovascular health, physical exercise can mitigate common side effects of cancer treatment such as fatigue, nausea, and pain [2]. By enhancing physical function, exercise helps patients maintain their independence and improves their overall quality of life during and after treatment [3].

Clinical outcomes with and without exercise

Recent studies have shown varying outcomes for cancer patients based on their engagement in physical exercise. A comprehensive review of the literature indicates significant improvements in overall survival, quality of life, and reduction in cancer recurrence rates for patients who actively participate in exercise programs [4]. For instance, Buffart, et al. demonstrated that exercise interventions significantly improve quality of life metrics among cancer survivors [4].

Benefits to the mind

The psychological and emotional toll of cancer and its treatments can be profound. Exercise has reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, which are prevalent among cancer patients [5]. The release of endorphins and other mood-energizing neurotransmitters during physical activity plays a crucial role in improving mental health. Group exercise programs offer social support, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of community and belonging [2].

Boosting immune function and beyond

Regular physical exercise enhances immune function, a critical factor for cancer patients, especially those undergoing immunosuppressive treatments. Improved circulation of immune cells can aid the body in fighting infections and potentially support tumor suppression [6]. Additionally, exercise-induced physiological changes, such as improved insulin sensitivity and reduced inflammation, create an internal environment less conducive to tumor growth [3].

Implementing exercises in treatment schedules

Given the demanding schedules of cancer treatments, implementing exercise can be challenging. Practical approaches include scheduling short, supervised exercise sessions that align with patients' treatment regimens, and leveraging periods when patients feel less fatigued [7]. Campbell, et al. suggest that cognitive benefits associated with physical activity can further motivate participation [5].

Person-centered approach in exercise oncology

The involvement of patients and their families is crucial for the success of exercise interventions. Educating families about the benefits and supporting patients in maintaining an active lifestyle fosters a holistic treatment environment [4]. Programs that engage both patients and their support systems have shown higher adherence and satisfaction rates at least in breast cancer patients [5].

The future of exercise in oncology

Ongoing research is crucial to further elucidate the

optimal types and intensities of exercise for different cancer populations. Studies like the MOVES (Measuring Oncological Value of Exercise and Statin) trial are poised to provide valuable data on the impact of exercise on cancer progression and patient outcomes [7]. Results from such studies will be instrumental in shaping future guidelines and recommendations for exercise in cancer care.

Physical exercise holds transformative potential in the treatment of cancer. By embracing exercise as a core component of holistic cancer care, we can enhance the physical, psychological, and overall well-being of patients [6]. A multidisciplinary approach to developing personalized exercise plans will help maximize these benefits, paving the way for improved patient outcomes and quality of life.

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