

# Sexual Health Assessment in Cancer Care

Is it a Show Stopper in Your Practice?

# Key Points

- ▶ IMPORTANCE OF SEXUALITY
- ▶ CANCER'S EFFECT ON SEXUALITY
- ▶ BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING SEXUALITY
- ▶ RESOURCES TO FACILITATE THE DISCUSSION AND INTERVENTIONS

# World Health Organization

“the integration of somatic, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being in ways that are positively enriching, and that enhances personality, communication and love” *WHO 2004*

# Why is sexual health important?

- ▶ Quality of life
- ▶ Psychosocial adjustment
- ▶ Stress relief
- ▶ Life affirming
- ▶ Treatments available



# Effects of cancer on sexuality

## ▶ Psychological

- Body image
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Grief
- Fear

## ▶ Physical

- Disfigurement
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Premature menopause
- Erectile dysfunction

# Are sexual concerns addressed?

- ▶ Don't remember a discussion
- ▶ Seldom addressed
- ▶ Few initiate conversations
- ▶ Limited to medical information
- ▶ Agree it should be

Patients

Physicians and Nurses

# What are the Barriers?



- ▶ Myths / Assumptions
- ▶ Discomfort
- ▶ Embarrassment
- ▶ Not integrated in care plan
- ▶ Training
- ▶ knowledge
- ▶ Attitudes

# What do patients prefer?

- ▶ Open communication
- ▶ Permission to discuss sexual concerns
- ▶ Practical suggestions on how to cope
- ▶ Discuss short and long term side effects
- ▶ Basic information throughout treatment
  - Sexual function
  - Reassurance that changes are expected

# Models

## ▶ PLISSIT

- **P**ermission to discuss sexuality
- **L**imited **I**nformation
- **S**pecific **S**uggestions
- **I**ntensive **T**herapy

# 5 A's Model

- ▶ Ask—how has treatment or disease affected sexual functioning
- ▶ Advise—acknowledge importance, normalize
- ▶ Assess— standardized sexual assessment
- ▶ Assist—resources, care plan, information
- ▶ Arrange Follow-up—check in regarding interventions

# RESOURCES

- ▶ **BCCA Symptom Management Guideline – Intimacy and Sexuality**

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/5D986439-3614-4F17-9E507FECC73C45D1/54305/IntimacyandSexuality1.pdf>

- ▶ **BCCA library– list of books, websites, etc.**
- ▶ **IPODE – Sexual Health & Cancer course**

# Recommendations

- ▶ Discuss potential changes in sexual functioning before, during and after treatment
- ▶ Provide practical information (written)
- ▶ Refer to the Intimacy and Sexuality SMG
- ▶ Follow up at regular intervals

# References

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- ▶ Sexual Health & Cancer *IPODE 2009*