

Psychological risk factors in cancer diseases

Shulamith Kreitler

School of Psychological Sciences, Tel-Aviv University, Israel

The talk will deal with the issue of the psychological correlates for cancer. Psychological correlates of a disease are personality tendencies or responses that can be shown to be risk factors for the disease and possibly contribute also to remission and recovery from the disease. Previous attempts to identify such correlates in oncology have failed, mainly because the psychological variables that have been assessed were likely to be affected by the disease itself (e.g., depression) and not enough consideration has been paid to medical variables. A set of studies launched at the PsychooncologyResearchCenter approached the issue from the point of view of the innovative theory and methodology of the cognitive orientation theory. The major thesis of this theory is that physiological processes that may be precursors of diseases are affected by psychological factors that are beliefs of four types (about oneself, about reality, about rules and norms and about goals) referring to themes that have been identified as relevant for a particular disease. Questionnaires assessing different kinds of cancer diseases have been prepared on the basis of the cognitive orientation theory. Studies showed that the questionnaires have enabled identifying correctly cancer patients, such as breast cancer, colon cancer, thyroid cancer and prostate cancer. For example, themes that constitute the personality correlates of colorectal cancer were found to include tendencies for compulsiveness, perfectionism, and self control. The talk will present studies concerning mainly breast cancer and colon cancer. Our claim is that the identified tendencies constitute potentially sources of tension and may be considered as psychological risk factors in oncology. The effects of psychological interventions based on the identified variables will be presented.

Biography

Shulamith Kreitler is a professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University, has established the Unit for Psychooncology at the Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv and since 2007 is the head of the psychooncology research center at Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer. She is a certified clinical and health psychologist and has taught at Harvard, Princeton and Yale, as well as in Argentina and Vienna, Austria. Her research is in personality and cognition, with an emphasis on psychological factors involved in the occurrence of oncological diseases and coping with them. Her books include Handbook of Chronic Pain (2007), Pediatric Psycho-Oncology: Psychosocial Aspects and Clinical Interventions (2004, 2012).