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Sleep disturbances and childhood cancer survivors; what we know and what we need to learn

Kathy Ruble

Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, USA

Childhood cancer survivors are at risk for many long-term complications including neurocognitive deficits, impaired quality of life (QOL) and poor cardiovascular outcomes. Co-morbid sleep disturbances are emerging as another long-term complication which may moderate these other, more conventional, complications. The purpose of this presentation is to review the literature on sleep disturbances in childhood cancer survivors and discuss their potential role in moderating other long-term complications including neurocognitive function, QOL and cardiovascular health. We will present the results of our published research revealing that 23% of survivors report clinically significant disorders of initiating and maintaining sleep; and sleep disturbances were associated with anxiety, stress and diminished school QOL in the population studied. In addition, the methodology (in-home electroencephalogram) and interim results of our new study examining the association of sleep architecture and neurocognitive function in 8-12 year old survivors of acute lymphoblastic leukemia will be presented. Sleep disturbances in survivors may play an important role in moderating long-term complications. Furthermore sleep disturbances in childhood are amenable to behavioral and complementary medicine interventions. Appropriate assessment and treatment of sleep disturbances in survivors may improve health and QOL outcomes in this vulnerable population.

rubleka@jhmi.edu

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