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The case study on mental trauma on cancer patients

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Introduction: Reproductive health cancers are the most stigmatized cancers. An article by PJ Hamen (2014) states that breast cancer changes one life forever and equal to the physical health is the emotional devastation that leaves one wounded in both body and spirit. While National Opinion Ramadam (2017) described a diagnosis of breast cancer as one of the most frightening experiences a woman can have.

Case Presentation: I felt a lump on the left breast, which was unusually larger than the right breast. After visiting two rural hospitals and palpation revealed a lump, which was hard, and non-mobile, I was referred to a main hospital for further diagnosis. I was only 34 yrs old. The one week of waiting for results gave me nightmares, hallucinations and I thought I was going to die even before I got the results. When I finally got the results, I knew my life had ended. Mammogram results had confirmed a first stage breast cancer. Being a nurse, I knew too well the course of treatment. Worries started to engulf me, as I wondered who would take care of my child since all I saw was death. The issues that started as a major concern, progressed to real psychological devastation. I could not use a mirror not to see my breast. Many times, I would drive to work and pass my office unknowingly. I was a very hardworking nurse had won few awards, I suddenly went down in performance and work stressed me so much over and above the stress I was undergoing. Financial crisis followed since raising money was such a challenge since my medical cover could not fully support me. Workplace became the biggest source of stress and I nearly lost my job. I was no longer myself. I attempted to commit suicide twice. The treatment process did not worry me as much as compared to the mental anguish, which drained me. I feared to share the diagnosis with people. Breast cancer is associated with many myths including use of family planning, which makes it such a stigma.

Management & Outcome: I sought treatment in the midst of all the stress I was going through. My doctor advised me on a breast-conserving Surgery (Lumpectomy) considering that cancer was in stage one, my age and the weight the diagnosis had weighed on me. The surgery removed the cancer while leaving as much of the breast intact. I underwent chemotherapy, surgery, followed by radiotherapy. The treatment did not spare me side effects. The hair loss, darkening of skin, pilling of lips are just a few consequences to mention. I did not want to see anybody. After treatment and all the side effects had cleared, one thing stood the psychological trauma. I later went down with degenerative disease of the disc, which prompted a spinal surgery.

Discussion: The mental drain in cancer weighs one more than pain related to surgery, treatment and any side effects. A key priority in treatment of cancer patients is counselling. Health care workers should address other stressors on a patient suffering from cancer and help a patient come up with a plan of reducing stressors.

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