

Rehabilitation For Cancer Survivors

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Advances in cancer treatment have resulted in larger numbers of long-term cancer survivors. In 2012, approximately 13.7 million cancer survivors were living in the United States. These numbers are projected to increase over the next decade with the largest group of survivors amongst those who are 5 years or more from diagnosis. Women with breast cancer account for 22% of survivors, whereas men with prostate cancer account for 20% of survivors.

Cancer survivors can have an array of effects from the cancer or its treatment such as bone density loss, cardiotoxicity, pulmonary dysfunction, cognitive deficits, distress, fatigue, motor dysfunction, lymphoedema, nerve injury, pain and sexual dysfunction.

Cancer survivors need rehabilitation to improve these early- and late-onset effects. It is very common for survivors to have multiple impairments. Early referral to oncology rehabilitation services can mitigate the suffering from these adverse effects of treatment. Each cancer patient will have a variable degree of physical problems which require attention. The formulation of rehabilitation goals should take into account the patient's tumour pathology, the anticipated progression of disease, any associated treatments, personal wishes and comorbidities.

Rehabilitation for these patients are crucial to the survivorship and restoration of the patient as a whole. The cancer survivor returns home hoping to resume his activities of daily living but may instead be faced with physical, psychological, social and financial barriers.

Rehabilitation for cancer survivors should be individualized for each patient throughout their care pathway and for some patients may start from the time of diagnosis to completion of treatment. The process of community reintegration for these survivors would be optimized in an interdisciplinary team management approach with the goal of restoring the cancer patient to his/her greatest functional capacity.