

Book Review

Depression and Cancer. Edited by David W. Kissane, Mario Maj, and Norman Sartorius. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2011. No. of pages: 244. Price: \$49.50 (US), £29.99 (UK). ISBN 978-0470689660.

Depression is perhaps the most important topic in psycho-oncology and probably the most researched. A Web of Science search returns about 6000 relevant peer-reviewed publications and this number is increasing by about 500 each year. Clinically it could be seen as the cornerstone of supportive cancer care. Yet it may have been somewhat overshadowed of late by a huge increase in research concerning more broadly defined emotional complications such as distress and anxiety. Depression is a topic about which there are many assumptions and this volume reminds us that there is still much to learn. Astute students are often amazed at the mismatch between the volume of published literature and the paucity of incontrovertible facts about depression in physical disease. Yet it is incorrect to say we have little evidence, as we often have a lot, but it is the quality of this evidence that is in question.

The editors of *Depression and Cancer* have assembled an impressive international list of contributors and the end result is a coherent narrative of many of the current issues concerning depression in cancer care. They have successfully presented the evidence in one small easily digestible format, which will appeal widely. The book's nine chapters address diverse issues related to depression and cancer, including its recognition (Chapter 4) and prevalence (Chapter 1), psychological factors (Chapter 2) and suicidal symptoms (Chapter 6), biology (Chapter 3), treatment adherence (Chapter 5), pharmacotherapy (Chapter 7), psychotherapy (Chapter 8), and social disparities (Chapter 9). These chosen areas are all well covered with an up-to-date evidence-based approach. As this is a short volume under 250 pages, the authors have done a remarkable job of packing in a host of valuable information. Readers will of course be aware of many relevant journal articles, but these experts bring a depth of explanation that is increasingly difficult for journals to accommodate. One further strength of the book, rare in a concise volume, is that it includes very helpful tables. It is also remarkably current, including references from 2010, which is important because textbooks can easily become out of date given the pace of publications. Criticisms of the book are minor. I would like to have seen chapters on the pheno-

menology of depression in cancer, the influence of depression on cancer outcomes, and perhaps more about collaborative care and primary care options. A developing area of considerable future importance is the overlap of depression and distress and the significance of less severe subtypes such as minor depression. To be fair, this is mentioned in various chapters, but it would be useful if this could be brought together in future editions. Some readers may desire more specific information about depression across different types of cancer, but I do not think there is strong justification for this as yet and data outside of the main sites are still rather slim.

Any reader who buys this book will certainly be better informed, but it is important to note that like all scientific fields, this one is currently in flux. For example, although the first publication about the prevalence of depression using an interview standard was in 1978, the first high quality attempt to develop screening for depression in cancer was in 1990, and the first examination of the role of somatic symptoms in diagnosis did not appear until 2003. Although the material presented is undeniably valuable, it also serves to highlight the many existing gaps in the literature on depression and cancer. In particular, is depression phenomenologically different in cancer? Is depression more common among those with advanced disease? What are the common psychiatric comorbidities alongside depression? What degree of daily dysfunction is lost in depression and do patients with depression receive equitable levels of medical care in cancer settings? These are all important clinical and research questions for the future. For now, the basic messages are worth repeating: that depression is not an invariable response to cancer, that depression is associated with reduced quality of life and reduced survival, as well as poorer compliance and prolonged hospitalization, and yet it remains overlooked and under-treated. In short, this book reminds us not to forget about the importance of depression in cancer, even while also considering other equally important emotional issues.

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