

# All in the Family: Talking with Siblings about Childhood Cancer

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Lessons learned from panelists and research

# How are siblings affected

## DEEPLY

- Identity--“Shaped/Made me who I am today”
  - Jenna—all she can remember
  - Kevin—last normal day of his life
- Relationships—“Closer and Stronger”
  - With siblings
  - With parents
  - With health care professionals/community supports like Ooch
- Negative and Positive experiences
  - “Not easy” to see physical and emotional pain of loved ones
  - “Maturity, compassion, patience, inspiration, hero, clear priorities”

# What does research say about psychosocial adjustment of siblings?

- Siblings do NOT experience greater rates of psychiatric disorders
- BUT significant subset experience
  - post-traumatic stress symptoms
  - negative emotional reactions
  - poor quality of life
- Distress is greater closer to time of diagnosis
- School troubles can appear within 2 yrs of diagnosis
- Siblings are psychologically at risk and also need support
- AND another subset report better than average adjustment

# Psychological Well-Being of Siblings and Family Environment

- A positive family environment can protect siblings from negative impact of having a sibling with cancer
- Open communication with parents and health care providers is crucial in supporting siblings
- Helpful responses include
  - Validating feelings,
  - Showing affection,
  - Spending time with the sibling
  - Answering siblings' questions

# Predictors of unmet needs and psychological distress in AYA siblings

- Study included 106 siblings 12-24 years old
- Attempted to identify risk factors
- Looked at three classes of predictors

Demographic Variables	Cancer-Specific Variables	Family Functioning variables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Age and gender of siblings</li><li>○ Age difference btw siblings</li><li>○ Number of siblings</li><li>○ Gender of ill sibling</li><li>○ Parents birth country</li><li>○ Number of parents living with participant</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Time since diagnosis</li><li>○ Current treatment status</li><li>○ Relapse status</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Family conflict</li><li>○ Family expressiveness</li><li>○ Family cohesion</li><li>○ Impact of disease on relationships and family communication</li><li>○ Quality of relationship with ill sibling</li></ul>

# Results—predictors of distress

- None of demographic variables were found to be predictors
- UNMET needs were higher when sibling on treatment or a relapse had occurred
- HIGHER distress associated with perceived decrease in the amount of attention siblings perceive they receive within the family and from others
- IMPLICATION—siblings' perceptions of being attended to is more relevant to their psychological well-being than general family functioning or the relationship with their ill sibling.

Questions and Comments ??

Thank You!