

## **Colorectal Cancer Patients Suffer from Psychological Problems Long After Completion of Treatment**

According to a survey, colorectal cancer patients rate their quality of life after treatment as good, particularly if they have to cope with small physical restrictions only. But the emotional and social lives of sufferers remain seriously affected over many years.

Although colorectal cancer is a common disease, little is known about the quality of life of patients after completion of treatment. A study involving over 300 colorectal cancer patients has shown that, many years after diagnosis, sufferers are struggling not so much with physical problems, but with serious psychological problems. In conducting this study, **Dr. Volker Arndt** and his colleagues of the Division of Clinical Epidemiology and Aging Research of the German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ), the Saarland Cancer Register and the Department of Epidemiology of Ulm University, have drawn attention to the mental strains and secondary diseases of colorectal cancer patients, especially those of a relatively young age.

Globally, more than one million new cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed each year. This makes colorectal cancer one of the most common cancers in the world. Advances in early detection and treatment have improved prognosis substantially over the past decades. Long-term studies involving colorectal cancer patients usually deal with recurrence of tumors or survival rates, while the long-term well-being and quality of life of patients after completion of treatment has been of little scientific interest to date.

Arndt et al. have shown that emotional and social problems considerably restrict the quality of life of colorectal cancer patients over many years after diagnosis. In addition, survivors suffer from respiratory distress, sleeping disorders, listlessness, bowel problems and financial worries. Improvements in the quality of life of patients who remained free of disease were only modest even after three years and were restricted to financial problems or adjustment to the stoma. Depression in patients persists even longer. The scientists also confirmed the suspected influence of age on psychological resistance. Thus, young patients are particularly affected by the mental consequences of the diagnosis. People at a younger age regard cancer as more threatening and experience health deficits more strongly than older sufferers. Yet older patients have to cope with more severe physical problems.

In the future, Arndt plans to investigate how long these problems reducing quality of life persist and whether young patients, in particular, might suffer from permanent psychological problems after treatment. Further studies on the psychological consequences of colorectal cancer are intended to improve the quality of life and well-being of those affected.

*Volker Arndt, Henrike Merx, Christa Stegmaier, Hartwig Ziegler and Hermann Brenner: Restrictions in quality of life in colorectal cancer patients over three years after diagnosis: A population based study. European Journal of Cancer, 2006, online veröffentlicht unter:*

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The task of the Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum in Heidelberg (German Cancer Research Center, DKFZ) is to systematically investigate the mechanisms of cancer development and to identify cancer risk factors. The results of this basic research are expected to lead to new approaches in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The Center is financed to 90 percent by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and to 10 percent by the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg. It is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers (Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft Deutscher Forschungszentren e.V., HGF).

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