

Holistic Rehabilitation of the Paediatric Cancer Patient in India: A Physiotherapist's Expedition of Three Years

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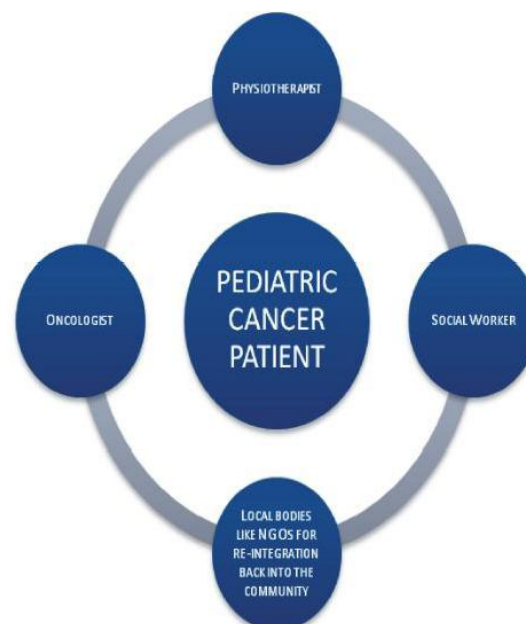
The successful rehabilitation of a pediatric cancer patient is a challenging process, as it involves not only medical rehabilitation of the patient, but also psychosocial rehabilitation of the family.[1] In India, the holistic rehabilitation of the pediatric cancer patient is especially difficult, as there is a lot of stigma associated with the disease.[2] Pediatric cancer patients in Intensive Units, hospital wards, Outpatient departments, and community settings in India were treated from 2005 to 2008 using different treatment strategies, depending on the setting and available resources. Detailed interactions, as a part of treatment protocol, with the pediatric patients and most importantly, with the families were done as a part of treatment protocol at the treating centres. The author has learnt certain effective strategies over a span of three years of rehabilitation with pediatric cancer patients, which are discussed in this short write up.

Many 'gaps' in the existing system of holistic cancer care were noted. When the child is admitted in the hospital for cancer treatment, the focus lies largely on the "medical aspects". However, many problems are faced by the child after successful completion of the treatment. Certain major issues are re-integration into society[2], caregiver support

[3], and future of the child including education and career.[4,5]

While the treatment is focused on solely the medical aspects, 'psychosocial rehabilitation' seems to lack focus. These problems may or may not fall within the purview of the physiotherapist; however referral to the right professional at the right time helped alleviate some of these problems (see Figure 1). An example of this could be referring to a local NGO to take care of the education and smooth integration of the patient into the community. It is important to ensure holistic rehabilitation of the pediatric cancer patient. Irrespective of what falls within the purview of the physiotherapist, core issues need to be addressed by timely referrals to the right health care professionals. A good referral

Figure 1: Showing the Proposed Referral System for Holistic Rehabilitation of the Pediatric Cancer Patient



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system needs to be incorporated into the current health system to ensure holistic care of the cancer pediatric patients in India.

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