Case Report

Breast cancer and Kubler-Ross grief Cycle

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Abstract

Grieving is a process that involves many different emotions, actions, and expressions as a means to make the person come to terms with a disease like cancer. Kubler-Ross grief cycle describes grief in phases as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, the process of grief differs from person to person. The intensity and length of grieving are influenced by emotional, psychological, and social structure of the family or place or community one lives in. Breast cancer is one such common disease that afflicts millions of people. The coping mechanism involved in facing grief is illustrated by two different cases. Case A, a breast cancer patient with healthy family backgrounds discovers a motive and desires to live as a mother to take care of her daughter with a positive influence to fight the disease. Case B, another breast cancer patient has a broken family background which forces her to develop a negative approach to fight the disease. These two cases are taken as examples to study the grief cycle.

Key words: Breast cancer, case A and B, grieving, Kubler-Ross grief cycle

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Introduction

Breast cancer is one of the leading health concerns for most of the countries including India. It is also one of the major causes of death worldwide. The incidence and mortality due to breast cancer are highest in most developed countries and also in India. However, there is variability in the cause, incidence, expression, and the risk factors from individual patient to patient. In other words, every case is unique and of considerable value in understanding the science and therapy behind it.^[1]

Several factors including age, early onset of menarche or having a late menopause, family history and genetic factors, previous case history, obesity, use of oral contraceptives and hormonal replacement therapy, and possibly diabetes

mellitus are associated with breast cancer risk.^[1] Yet, breast cancer needs holistic approach to deal with the physical, biological, and psychosocial domains of each patient. The following two case histories show how each case is unique and needs careful scrutiny to understand the cycle of grief possibly in them.

Case Report

Case A

Patient A is a 50-year-old lady married and had one daughter. She belonged to a middle-class family. She wanted to have family planning, and therefore, she was on oral contraceptives. She was mildly obese. She felt a lump in her left breast and was advised to have mammography. She was referred to Cancer Hospital, Adayar, Chennai. She was diagnosed to have Stage II breast cancer. She underwent radical mastectomy and chemotherapy followed by radiotherapy. During the period of her treatment, she lost her husband in a motorcycle accident. She suddenly realized her moral responsibility to take care of the daughter who was doing her engineering. She realized that there was an urgent need and a purpose for her to live and fight the disease. She fought with a great mental resolve and lived for 2 years post-mastectomy.

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