Features of formation and organization of psycho-social assistance in the cancer service of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The article describes the specifics of the formation, current status, and organization of psycho-social assistance in the cancer service in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Kazakh Institute of Oncology and Radiology successfully implements the principle of a multidisciplinary approach, which implies psycho-social assistance as part of the treatment process. The development of psycho-social assistance in the oncological service increases treatment efficacy through the rational use of cancer patients’ internal resources. The psycho-social protection of cancer patients can improve their quality of life and disease prognosis.

Keywords: oncology, oncopsychology, psycho-social assistance, quality of life.

Psycho-social assistance as one of the synergetic areas is an important stage in the treatment and rehabilitation of critically ill patients, including cancer patients. Psycho-social assistance is currently characterized by the active development of methodological, scientific, and organizational foundations and a wide range of practical applications to improve cancer patients’ quality of life (Figure 1).

In 1969, Prof. N.V. Lazarev initiated the establishment of a Tumor Prevention and Rehabilitation Department at the Kazakh Institute of Oncology and Radiology (KazIOR, Almaty). The 60-beds Department was headed by the Candidate of Medical Sciences L.N. Gendrikson. Main directions of the Department activities included the development and introduction of new methods of diagnostics, treatment and prevention of precancerous diseases of the gastrointestinal tract. The Department conducted scientific and research work on the substantiation of use of the new drugs of biological and physical nature in the complex therapy of chronic esophagitis, gastritis, and gastroduodenal ulcer. They also carried out dispensary observation through annual clinical examinations of patients with some forms of gastritis, polyposis, esophageal leukoplakia, and ulcerative esophagitis.

The Department staff has defended one doctoral and four candidate’s theses, published more than 100 scientific papers, issued two monographs, obtained five copyright certificates.
The Psycho-Social Assistance Department (herein-after – the Department) was established at KazIOR in 2016 as an advisory and rehabilitation unit. The Department receives cancer patients who need psychological and social support during treatment at KazIOR (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Employees of the Psycho-Social Assistance Department.
The origins of the Department

The KazIOR Psycho-Social Assistance Department provides informational and methodical support to the psychologists working in the regions. Scientific-practical conferences and seminars for psychologists and social workers are held annually to form students’ competencies on current issues of psycho-social assistance in the Republic of Kazakhstan (Figure 3). More than 500 psychologists and social workers of the health care system have been trained at KazIOR (Figure 4).

Figure 3 – Scientific and practical seminar with the participation of international experts

Figure 4 – Educatve course for specialists from the regions of Kazakhstan
The KazIOR Psycho-Social Assistance Department staff conducts synergetic research aimed at the development of psycho-social assistance in the cancer service of Kazakhstan, develops and puts into practice new methods of diagnostics, therapy, and complex psycho-social rehabilitation of patients (Figure 5). They have defended two candidate's theses, more than 20 master's theses, prepared 29 Implementation Reports, two clinical guidelines, one methodological guideline, and one monograph. Research projects of the Department staff have been awarded at international competitions.

Psychologists and social workers have been introduced to the oncological dispensaries' staff since 2013, as part of the implementation of clause 39 of the Action Plan “Cancer Care Development Program in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2012-2016” [1]. Psychosocial assistance offices were open in all oncological dispensaries of the country (in 13 oncological centers and seven oncological departments of multidisciplinary hospitals). They study the specifics of cancer patients' psychological characteristics and their response to the disease, ways of coping with this crisis situation (Figure 6).

It is extremely important and necessary to continue establishing a system of medical, social, and psychological rehabilitation of cancer patients undergoing treatment in oncological hospitals. Today, psychologists possess many highly efficient techniques that reinforce and support cancer patients' main treatment and rehabilitation. Psycho-correctional programs are being developed and successfully applied in clinical practice to achieve this goal. In these programs, various methods verified in psychotherapy are harmoniously combined for the treatment and rehabilitation of cancer patients (Figure 7).
Conclusions:

New approaches to improving the quality of life of patients suggest a multimodal rehabilitation process involving psycho-social service. They improve the quality of life, treatment efficacy, and rehabilitation potential through the rational use of cancer patients' inner resources. This increases the quality of life and life expectancy of cancer patients and their social activity and expands their social adaptation and rehabilitation conditions.

Over the short period of its existence, the psycho-social service has made evident the advantages of providing holistic assistance to cancer patients. The increase in psychological assistance efficacy is manifested in the following indicators: improvement of the emotional state of patients – 85.1%; improvement of physical condition – 34.2%; reduction of pain – 28.5%; acceptance of their life situation – 74.2%; normalization of relations with relatives – 62.3%; normalization of relations (acceptance and trust) with medical personnel – 54.2% [2]. It is extremely important and necessary to continue establishing a system of psychological and social assistance to patients receiving inpatient treatment for cancer in Kazakhstani hospitals, based on the multidisciplinary, patient-oriented, and patient-centered approach.

References: