



Forgotten or Overlooked? Psychosocial Impact on Siblings of Children with Leukemia

Jalal Nourmohammadi ¹, Fereshteh Ghaljaei ^{2,*}

¹ Department of Nursing, Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran

² Department of Pediatric Nursing, Community Nursing Research Center, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran

***Corresponding Author:** Department of Pediatric Nursing, Community Nursing Research Center, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, Zahedan, Iran. Email: ghaljaei.f51@gmail.com

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Dear Editor,

Leukemia, which necessitates prolonged treatment and specialized care, affects not only the patient but also the entire family dynamic. When a child is diagnosed with leukemia, the attention of the family, healthcare providers, and the broader community shifts towards supporting and treating the affected child (1). However, during this process, siblings may often find themselves overlooked, engulfed in profound silence (2). While it is both natural and understandable for parents and medical professionals to concentrate their efforts on the ill child, it is important to remember that the siblings are also experiencing the same stressful and anxious environment (3). These siblings frequently grapple with a range of complex feelings, including fear, anxiety, jealousy, guilt, and loneliness (4). They tend to suppress their own needs, remain quiet, and shoulder undue burdens. Many feel as though they are invisible, not as healthy children who should be relishing their youth, but as quiet bystanders to the unfolding crisis (5). This situation can lead to emotional detachment within the family and might have lasting impacts on interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, and even future life decisions of these children (6). Despite the profound impact of a child's leukemia on the entire family, siblings are often overlooked, and their emotional and psychological needs remain unmet. The scarcity of comprehensive research on their experiences highlights the necessity for in-depth studies to identify psychosocial consequences and develop effective supportive interventions.

Strategies for Improvement

1- Addressing the emotional needs of siblings of ill children nurses observing family dynamics within hospital settings can detect signs of distress such as anxiety, sadness, or feelings of neglect in siblings. These observations can lead to referrals for psychological support (7).

2- Educating and empowering parents providing parents with approaches to maintain emotional equilibrium among their children is crucial. This includes educating them on the importance of allocating individual time for each child, even under challenging treatment schedules, and advising on the use of affirming language and emotional availability to support all children in the family (8).

3- Communicating with the siblings of hospitalized children initiating direct conversations with these siblings when possible within the hospital setting allows for an understanding of their emotions and provides answers to their questions. Employing straightforward, age-appropriate language helps demystify the patient's condition, alleviating fear and anxiety. Encouragement of expressive activities like drawing, writing, or playing is also beneficial (9).

4- Coordinating across professions facilitating introductions between the patient's siblings and members of the psychological, social work, or family counseling teams is important. Participation in cross-disciplinary meetings helps tailor family-specific support programs (10).

5- Demonstrating supportive behaviors creating a supportive and empathetic environment for all family members within the clinical setting is essential. This involves shifting focus not only to the patient but also to addressing the broader needs of the entire family (11).

6- Engaging in public education and community initiatives involvement in public education sessions and community workshops is vital to enhance understanding among families and educational personnel about the effects of illness on siblings (12).

Conclusions

Siblings of children diagnosed with leukemia frequently become overlooked within the family dynamic, placing them at considerable risk for psychosocial challenges. Overlooking their emotional requirements may result in enduring impacts on their mental well-being and their ability to adapt effectively. Therefore, incorporating interventions that focus on the family as a whole into the treatment regimen, particularly those that provide psychosocial support for the healthy siblings, is crucial for enhancing both the quality of care and the overall resilience of the family.

Footnotes

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