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Predicting the Course of Cancer by Medical and Psychological Indicators

Shulamith Kreitler
Tel Aviv University, Israel

Two studies are briefly reported. The objective of both was to predict the course of disease in cancer patients. The first study was devoted to examining the predictive power of the psychological factors. The second study was devoted to checking the joint predictive power of medical and psychological factors. The psychological predictors were scores in a specially constructed questionnaire assessing the motivation for survival on the basis of the Cognitive Orientation approach. This Cognitive Orientation Questionnaire of Survival provided scores on four types of beliefs (about oneself, about reality and others, about rules and norms and about goals and wishes) in regard to items presenting themes that had been identified as related to survival, such as acceptance of uncertainty, compromising in regard to perfectionism and readiness to get help. In study 1 the number of participants was 166 (melanoma, breast, colorectal). Their survival was assessed four years after initial diagnosis, on the basis of the psychological factors. The scores of the survival questionnaire provided good prediction of survival after 4 years in 78.9% of the cases. In the second study the predictive power of both medical and the psychological factors was assessed. The major hypothesis was that both the medical and psychological factors would contribute to predicting survival. The medical factors were the standard ones used in medicine for the specific disease. The psychological ones were the survival scores of the questionnaire. The number of participants was 89. They were followed for 12 years. Both kinds of predictors contributed significantly to the prediction jointly, with the medical ones being more important in the first five years and the psychological ones gaining in importance in later years.

Biography:

Dr. Shulamith Kreitler has graduated in psychology and psychiatry at Bern University, Switzerland. She has been a full professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University since 1986, has worked at the universities of Princeton, Harvard, Yale University, Vienna and Buenos Aires. She is a certified clinical psychologist and health psychologist. She has established the psychooncology unit (Ichilov) and the Center for Psychooncology Research (Sheba Medical Center). She has developed a new approach to meaning, to predicting and changing behavior and identifying psychological risk factors for cancer. She has published over 200 articles and 18 scientific books and is preparing a book about psychooncology (Springer).