



GeriCare

Assessment of Depression in Palliative Care

Do you know that depression is common yet underdiagnosed among palliative patients? It is important to recognize and treat depression as it can lead to poorly controlled symptoms and reduce quality of life. Fret not, in this video, we will share with you how to recognise depression.

Depression is a constant feeling of sadness and loss of interest which stops you from doing your normal activities. It negatively affects how you feel, think or act.

How do we spot signs of depression? Let's follow Sam, a patient with advanced cancer, as he goes through his journey.

According to DSM-V, there needs to be 5 or more symptoms present during the same 2-week period. At least 1 of the symptoms is either:

- depressed mood most of the day and nearly every day
- or loss of interest and pleasure most of the day and nearly every day

Sam experiences other symptoms of depression too.

- Sam feels worthless and guilty as he loses his roles as a breadwinner in the family.
- He has poor sleep pattern as he is either sleeping too much (hypersomnia) or too little (insomnia).
- Sam also feels tired easily and has little energy to engage in activities.
- Focusing on tasks becomes more difficult as he has decreased concentration.
- Sam has a loss of appetite resulting in significant weight loss over time. However, there may also be times when one seeks comfort in food and overeats which causes weight gain.
- Often, Sam gets easily irritable by people and things around him, even at the smallest of things.
- Sam thinks of death frequently, often pondering that it is meaningless to go on in life. As suicide is considered an emergency, it is important to inform Sam's medical team about his condition.

As Sam has advanced cancer, it is possible that some of his cancer symptoms may overlap with the physical symptoms of depression.

Endicott recommended the Endicott's substitution criteria to help healthcare workers better identify and diagnose depression in patients with terminal illness.

Timely identification of depression can help Sam better cope with his symptoms. For more information on management of depression, click on to our next video!

References

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3. Tang, P. L. (2015). A systematic review and meta-analysis of demoralization and depression in patients with cancer. *Psychosomatics*, 56(6), 634 – 643.