“Chemo Brain” Is a Growing Problem for Cancer Survivors

As more people survive cancer treatment, mental fog has become a growing problem.

June 28, 2018 By Casey Halter

As more people survive cancer treatment, “chemo brain,” or mental fog, has become a growing problem — and scientists are calling for more solutions to the problem, Healthline reports.

In a recent article published in Trends in Neuroscience, three specialists from the National Cancer Institute say it’s time to find out what’s causing cancer-related cognitive impairment (CRCI). They also write that chemo brain is already widespread among cancer survivors (affecting between 17 and 75 percent of patients post-treatment) and is likely to grow as effective therapies become available.

Currently, doctors diagnose CRCI using interviews and standardized tests designed to evaluate issues in patient cognition. Patients with chemo brain typically score in the low- to-normal range, describing problems with concentration, short-term memory, multitasking and finding words. A diagnosis is of little comfort to patients who don’t understand the cause of or have a solution for their mental decline.

According to researchers, chemotherapy may not be the only contributing factor to mental fog that persists post-treatment. Other treatments, including surgery, hormone therapy and radiation, could play a role. Having cancer may also contribute to the problem, but more research is needed on all fronts.

At this point, there are no clear answers as to why some patients get chemo brain, how long it lasts or how best to address it. That’s why the paper suggests that researchers begin developing new measures of cognitive ability specific to people with CRCI. They also call for more collaboration among neuroscientists and clinical researchers who study the condition.

Meanwhile, some interventions chemo brain patients can pursue include exercise and antidepressants in small doses.

To learn more about cancer and mental health, click here.

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