

A HOLISTIC CARE-GIVING MODEL IN CANCER FOCUSING ON MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

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When cancer strikes, the diagnosis has a major impact on the family, especially on the children. It is not easy for a parent to explain his/her serious, life-threatening illness to a child, whatever the child's age may be. Most children are deeply perturbed when hearing that their mother or father is ill, particularly if the parent suffers from cancer and needs permanent medical support, thus changing the child's perception of the body image for the future. The diagnosis of cancer produces feelings of confusion, uncertainty and fear in patients and even more so in their children, who are being confronted with strange medical terms, the disquieting atmosphere of the hospital and the parent, who is very ill.

Many psychological reports focus on the patient's concerns – predominantly on breast cancer patients – about the effects of the mother's illness, less on the relationship with her/his child and on the child's development.

The NGO „Rexrodt von Fircks Foundation“, Ratingen, Germany, responded to this concern and has created a new model of care-giving to mother and child when the mother is suffering from breast cancer. During the first treatment and the phase of convalescence following the first clinical treatment, a permanent mother-child rooming-in environment is provided, as judged necessary by the psychiatrist/psychologist mindful of the child's need and - at the same time - giving the mother the space and tools for effective (continuing) parental care during the acute crisis.

There is an abundance of literature on the psychological and social needs of cancer patients but a dire shortage of literature on how the healthy offspring of cancer patients is threatened by the parent's disease in terms of social development, school attendance and learning difficulties.

An interdisciplinary board of scientists, involved in cancer care-giving, is evaluating and accompanying this project of extended and preventive support, in order to record and publish the beneficial effects on both the mothers as well as the children.