Stephen T. Keir, MPH, DrPH Receives Young Investigator Award
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Stephen T. Keir, MPH, DrPH, Receives Young Investigator Award at the Chicago Supportive Oncology Conference, September 27Â–29, 2007.

Stress and Quality of Life in Brain Cancer Survivors

This year marked the first presentation of the Young Investigator Awards at the Chicago Supportive Oncology Conference (CSOC), held from September 27Â–29, 2007. The purpose of these awards was to recognize the professional development of scientists-in-training who are pursuing research in the field of supportive oncology. The 2007 recipients of the CSOC Young Investigators Awards focused their research on a common topic: stress and long-term survival in brain cancer patients.

The first award winner, Stephen T. Keir, PhD, of the Preston Robert Tisch Brain Tumor Center at Duke University, embarked on the study of stress as it relates to long-term survival in brain cancer, because Â“patients with brain tumors are living longer, and it is important to understand their needs.Â” He added, Â“Unlike many other cancer populations, long-term survivors of brain cancer can remain on treatment over a long time, and they are vulnerable in terms of problems related to both their disease and treatment. Stress levels may decline when cancer patients reach long-term milestones, but in brain cancer, the possibility of recurrence is a reality. We found that long-term survivors of brain cancer may be just as stressed as the newly diagnosed, though there was something of a shift in what concerns them.Â”

In his study of 75 adult brain tumor patients, 61% reported elevated levels of stress. Scores were not significantly associated with age, gender, treatment status, or tumor group. Long-term survivors (patients who were 18 months or more from their diagnosis) were just as likely to report being stressed as were those diagnosed within 18 months; however, they reported fewer items of concern, Dr. Keir stated at a poster session during the CSOC meeting.

Based on the Perceived Stress Scale, mean levels of stress were significantly higher for women than men (17 vs 14). With regard to specific concerns, long-term survivors reported significantly fewer
physical and tumor-specific concerns, and there was a trend toward fewer emotional concerns

in these patients than in more newly diagnosed patients. There were no differences in reported concerns according to patientsÂ' treatment (currently on versus off treatment) or disease status (stable versus unstable).

Â"We found, however, that the stress of living as a survivor is different from the stress of actively fighting the disease. These patients never fully return to who they once were,Â" Dr. Keir added. Predictors
of stress among the long-term survivors were related to familial, emotional, and practical issues, such as the financial burden incurred by their illness. Â"They shifted away from the earlier physical concerns,Â" he said.

Dr. Keir thanked the Tug McGraw Foundation for funding his research. Â"This group has made a real commitment to improving quality of life in brain tumor patients,Â" he concluded.