

12-3

Psychosocial Support for Siblings of Children With Cancer

Goldish M, Ring SK

SuperSibs!, Rolling Meadows, IL, USA

PURPOSE: When a child is diagnosed with cancer, everyone in the family needs healing, including the siblings. Each year, 12,500 U.S. children are diagnosed with cancer and their siblings are thrust into the psychosocial upheaval of cancer. Existing research describes siblings' need for ongoing information and support for their feelings of guilt, fear, depression, isolation and anxiety. Interventions to address sibling needs are rarely described in research literature and uncommonly available in the clinical setting. This presentation is based on five years of practice by *SuperSibs!* an organization that has listened to and served the needs of siblings of children with cancer from across the United States and Canada. Practical interventions, tools, resources and insights from *SuperSibs!* Sibling STAR (Support, Training, Awareness, Recognition) Program will be presented.

METHODS: Siblings psychosocial adjustment will be described followed by description of tools/activities of the work of *SuperSibs!* STAR Program developed for professionals addressing the needs of siblings of childhood cancer patients. The STAR Program was developed based on data from five years of *SuperSibs!* work including over 400 scholarship essays from teen siblings, five sibling focus groups, eight teen sibling chat room sessions, over 1,000 sibling and parent impact surveys and individual communications from 10% of the >10,000 siblings and parents served by our program.

RESULTS: Consistent themes and requests have resulted in the development, implementation and refinement of direct services and *SuperSibs!* Sibling STAR Program for professionals. APOS members will learn of programs/activities to foster communication and coping capabilities to help siblings feel recognized and supported as they navigate through phases of diagnosis, treatments, therapy completion, relapse, palliative care and/or post-death.

CONCLUSION: APOS professionals will have tools to implement integrated, ongoing, targeted support for these "shadow survivors" — the siblings.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: Implemented sibling support programs can be tracked in longitudinal studies to maximize long-term psychosocial health and/or post-traumatic growth for siblings and further optimize total family healing.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS: Best practices from this program will enable integrated sibling support as standard operating procedure for on-site pediatric oncology services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDING: Elements of this program were funded by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, Ronald McDonald House Charities, Health Resources Services Administration and Centers for Disease Control.