Psychosocial outcome following genetic risk counselling for familial colorectal cancer. A comparison of affected patients and family members.

Abstract:

Few studies have reported prospective data on psychosocial outcomes after genetic counselling in families with suspected hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC). This prospective study examines the impact of multidisciplinary risk counselling on the psychosocial outcome of 139 affected cancer patients and 233 family members without cancer at risk for HNPCC. Participants completed questionnaires specific to HNPCC before and 8 weeks after attending the familial cancer clinic. Affected patients' levels of distress were closely related to their health status and exceeded that of unaffected individuals, as did worry regarding their relatives' risk. A significant reduction in general anxiety (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale), distress specific to familial CRC (Impact of Events Scale) and general cancer worry (Distress Hereditary Disorder) was demonstrated after counselling in both affected patients and unaffected individuals. Reduction in distress was more pronounced in affected patients given a high risk of HNPCC compared with those at intermediate risk. Among unaffected individuals, distress declined regardless of what clinical risk they were assigned. Their perceptions of risk and cancer-related threat declined, while confidence in effective surveillance increased. These results suggest the beneficial
effects of multidisciplinary counselling even when high-risk information is conveyed. A patient's previous cancer experience is likely to contribute to clinically relevant distress (15% of those patients), indicating the need for appropriate counselling.