Elderly cancer patients benefit from being fully informed

Recovery from major surgery is generally more difficult for older patients. This is why targeted post-operative care and physical activity are particularly important. Researchers from Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin have now been able to show that strategies aimed at patient empowerment and the provision of adequate information are particularly effective in this regard. Providing patients with information on what to do before and after surgery can prevent complications and unnecessarily lengthy hospital stays. Results from this study have been published in the international journal *PLOS ONE*.

Patient empowerment allows patients to become actively involved in their own recovery and rehabilitation. Not only does this result in increased levels of autonomy and control post-surgery, it also leads to significantly improved treatment outcomes in patients with chronic diseases. In a German Cancer Aid-funded study on patient engagement, Prof. Dr. Claudia Spies, the Head of Charité's Department of Anesthesiology and Surgical Intensive Care Medicine, and her team were able to show that older patients undergoing major cancer surgery benefit from being provided with additional information aimed at supporting their recovery. The researchers were able to show that patient empowerment leads to improved rehabilitation, and results in improved quality of life.

For this study, patients over 65 years old and undergoing major cancer surgery were divided into two groups: patients in the intervention group received a brochure containing information on what to do in the days leading up to and following surgery, as well as tips on how to become actively involved in the recovery process. Patients were also asked to complete a diary throughout the duration of their treatment. Patients in the control group did not receive any additional information. The result: researchers were able to record improved treatment results, particularly with regard to postoperative pain. Prof. Claudia Spies explains that "limited physical functional capacity and a compromised nutritional status are crucial factors in determining surgical outcomes in elderly patients. This applies to both short-term and long-term outcomes, in addition to the length and complexity of the procedure involved." In many cases, reduced pre-operative functional capacity is also associated with a low level of acceptance of, and compliance with, measures aimed at patient empowerment.


Links

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