Psychosocial risk factors before and after organ transplantation

Summary / Zusammenfassung

Background
So far, researchers have not achieved a good understanding of psychosocial factors and their effects on transplant patients’ quality of life, life satisfaction, psychological and physical well-being before and after transplantation. Yet, about one third of organ recipients show relevant psychological problems. Factors thought to increase the patient’s risk for developing psychological problems include substance abuse, lack of social support, and psychiatric symptoms. The study was designed to investigate the role of psychosocial (risk) factors in organ transplant patients.

Aims
The study investigates the associations between risk factors and quality of life, physical and psychological well-being, spiritual belief systems and life satisfaction before and after transplantation. Standardising psychosocial screening methods prior to waiting list placement for organ transplantation. Developing guidelines for the identification and psychosocial counseling of patients who are at risk for developing psychological and behavioral problems that affect transplant outcome. Investigating the association of psychosocial factors with medical problems and survival.

Methods
A consecutive sample of transplant patients is recruited at the University Hospital Zurich during the routine interdisciplinary screening procedure before waiting list placement. Participants are interviewed and fill out standardised questionnaires every 3 months during time on the waiting list and at 6, 12, and 24 months post-operation.

Results
In the completed research project, N=261 participants have entered the study prior to waiting list placement. That is, n=21 heart, n=70 liver, n=43 lung, n=49 stem cell, and n=78 kidney transplant candidates. Recruitment was completed by the end of August 2003. The average age of patients included in the study was 48.6 years and 66% were men. Considerable differences between organ groups regarding psychosocial factors could be observed. At the time of the psychological screening interview prior to waiting list placement quality of life, life and health satisfaction of transplant candidates were significantly lower compared to a healthy population while anxiety and depression were only slightly increased. When asked, one third of the patients stated a need for psychological counselling, whereas study physicians assessed 50% of them in need of psychological counselling. On the waiting list the above mentioned levels did not change considerably. After the organ transplantation there was a significant increase in quality of life, life and health satisfaction while anxiety and depressions score were close to normal. The course of psychosocial factors is somewhat independent of the physical factors.

Conclusion
Psychosocial screening methods prior to waiting list placement for organ transplantation reveal important information on the course of psychosocial factors before and after organ transplantation. Psychological counselling should be available at all stages of the organ transplant process.

Publications / Publikationen
Wie ein neues Organ Psyche und Umfeld belastet. Agenda des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds, April 2002


Goetzmann L, Scheuer E, Naef R, Russi E W, Buddeberg C, Boehler A (2005) Psychosocial situation and physical health in 50 patients more than one year after lung transplantation. CHEST 127: 166-170


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