



Long-term Cognitive and Functional Outcomes in Survivors of Pediatric Brain Tumors

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INTRODUCTION

Pediatric brain tumors are among the most common childhood cancers, and advances in surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy have significantly improved survival rates. However, surviving a brain tumor often comes at a cost. Long-term survivors frequently face cognitive, emotional, and functional challenges that impact their quality of life. Understanding and addressing these outcomes are essential for optimizing survivorship care and fostering meaningful recovery. The brain's developmental trajectory during childhood makes pediatric patients particularly vulnerable to cognitive impairments. Tumor location, treatment modalities, and the age at diagnosis collectively influence the degree and nature of cognitive deficits. Survivors commonly experience deficits in attention, memory, processing speed, and executive function. For example, damage to the prefrontal cortex or exposure to cranial radiation can impair working memory and problem-solving skills. These challenges often manifest as difficulties in academic performance, requiring tailored educational interventions. Longitudinal studies have observed declines in IQ among survivors, particularly those treated with cranial irradiation.

DESCRIPTION

Tumor location and surgical interventions may result in motor impairments, such as hemiparesis or ataxia, and sensory deficits, including vision or hearing loss. Rehabilitation programs, including physical and occupational therapy, play a critical role in restoring function and independence. Treatments involving the hypothalamic-pituitary axis can lead to growth hormone deficiencies, hypothyroidism, and other endocrine disorders. These complications can affect physical development, energy levels, and overall quality of life. Many survivors experience anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. The emotional toll

of living with a history of cancer, coupled with cognitive and physical challenges, underscores the importance of mental health support. Behavioral issues, such as impulsivity or difficulty with peer interactions, are also common. Tumors in the cerebellum can affect motor coordination, while those in the frontal lobes impact executive functions. Younger patients are more vulnerable to treatment-related neurotoxicity, as their brains are still developing.

CONCLUSION

Survivors of pediatric brain tumors face a myriad of long-term cognitive and functional challenges, profoundly impacting their quality of life. Through early intervention, personalized rehabilitation, and advances in treatment, these challenges can be mitigated, enabling survivors to lead fulfilling lives. The evolving field of survivorship care must continue to prioritize research, innovation, and comprehensive support to bridge the gap between survival and recovery in pediatric neuro-oncology. As survival rates continue to improve, the focus of pediatric neuro-oncology must expand to include long-term quality of life. Biomarker research may enable clinicians to predict which patients are most at risk for cognitive decline, allowing for personalized interventions. Additionally, integrating technology, such as virtual reality-based rehabilitation or AI-driven neurocognitive assessments, holds promise for enhancing care delivery.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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