Background Information: Medical advances have improved the five-year survival rate for patients diagnosed with cancer and some late-stage cancers that once were terminal have now become manageable, chronic conditions. Because of this, more individuals with cancer as well as survivors of cancer are re-entering the workforce. Resuming the role of worker is considered an important step in recovery for many. Occupational therapy (OT) can play an important role in facilitating a successful transition back to work for both cancer patients and survivors.

**CURRENT STATISTICS: MORE LONG TERM SURVIVORS**

5 year survival rate is 65.6% in the United States

- **Individuals with a cancer diagnosis under age 65 have nearly a 73% 5-year survival rate.**
- **This demographic represents those still in the workforce.**

*Even after a cancer diagnosis, 80% of people return to work with little, if any, difference in their work performance.*

*(Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2017)*

**More individuals surviving cancer means ...**

- **More survivors are re-entering the workforce.**
- **Having to work longer until retirement in order to maintain financial stability.**
- **Managing a chronic medical condition.**
- **Employers need to accommodate individuals with cancer and survivors on a more regular basis in work environments.**

**IMPACT OF SIDE EFFECTS OF CANCER TREATMENT**

- **Chemotherapy**
  - Fatigue
  - Proven to infection
  - Nausea/Vomiting
  - Mood Changes
  - “Chemo Brain”
  - Weight Changes
  - Hair loss

- **Radiation**
  - Fatigue
  - Eating problems
  - Skin problems
  - Hair loss

*(American Cancer Society, 2018)*

**OT TO SUPPORT RETURN TO WORK**

- **Assess Emotional & Mental Readiness**
  - Temporal (oriented to time, place, & person)
  - Handle relationships with co-workers, bosses, clients that one would interact with at work
  - Physically/mentally feel ready to focus on work life
  - Able to concentrate on work tasks

- **Assess Physical Readiness**
  - Able to perform job duties physically with or without accommodations
  - Able to perform ADLs to get through the work
  - Able to perform IADLs necessary for one’s job

*(Stergiou-Kita, Pritlove, Holness, Kirsh, van Eerd, Duncan & Jones, 2016)*

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY INTERVENTIONS**

- **Person/Client Centered**
  - Provide individuals with education regarding the work place, encouragement and counseling on work-related subjects
  - Address fears and concerns regarding re-entry to work
  - Problem solve coping skills and mechanisms to utilize at work in real time as issues arise

- **Occupational Therapy’s Role in Oncology: Returning to Work During and After Treatment**

*(Braveman, 2017)*

**GAPS IN ONCOLOGY CARE THAT OT CAN FILL**

- **Patient Education:**
  - Make sure individuals are informed of their legal rights and protections (FMLA, ADA)

- **Data Collection:**
  - Clinical trials on cancer interventions & treatments
  - How cancer treatment affects individual in short & long term in their worker role.

- **Working with Employers:**
  - Recommend and ensure that accommodations are made so individuals can be productive workers

*(Braveman, 2017)*

**WHAT’S NEXT FOR OT IN ONCOLOGY?**

- **OT Services are Needed in Oncology**
  - Studies done thus far have shown success in helping clients successfully return to work
  - More research is needed to study concrete occupational therapy interventions that will work in this field

- **Growing population that could benefit from OT services (more survivors, more people living with cancer as a chronic condition)**

*(Braveman, 2017)*

**REFERENCES**


