

Adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer survivors experience unique needs and challenges, including the long-term risk of adverse treatment and disease effects. In addition, consequences of the cancer experience may profoundly affect their quality of life. This article describes the development of an interprofessional survivorship clinic established to meet the unique needs of AYA cancer survivors aged 18–39 years.

AT A GLANCE

- AYA cancer survivors require long-term follow-up care because of adverse treatment and disease effects.
- Post-treatment physical, mental, emotional, financial, and social challenges can negatively affect the quality of life of AYA cancer survivors.
- Survivorship programs designed specifically for AYA cancer survivors should account for the unique needs and challenges of this population.

KEYWORDS

survivorship; adolescents; young adults; psychosocial; disease effects; quality of life

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Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors

Development of an interprofessional survivorship clinic

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Adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer survivors, aged 15–39 years, may face lifelong risks of adverse effects from treatment and disease (Cavallo, 2019). Several factors contribute to this reality. Cancers in this population are often more aggressive and advanced at diagnosis than those experienced by children or older adults (Close et al., 2019). The plan of care for prevalent cancers in this age group, such as leukemia or sarcoma, can be lengthy, may include several treatment modalities, and may span several phases of care (Baker & Syrjala, 2018). Life disruptions during these developmentally dynamic years can result in complex psychosocial consequences (Jones et al., 2020).

Even post-treatment, AYA survivors may express concerns regarding the physical, mental, emotional, financial, and social consequences of their cancer experience (Hydeman et al., 2019). Fear of infertility, organ system toxicities, apprehension surrounding intimate relationships, and uncertainties regarding employment are among the post-treatment concerns navigated by this population. Financial worries can arise because of the disruption of college enrollment requirements and employment, which may threaten career opportunities, economic status, and future earning potential (Baker & Syrjala,

2018). AYA survivors may experience challenges related to paying healthcare bills, as well as obtaining health and life insurance (Jones et al., 2020). These circumstances may reinforce the dependence of AYA survivors on their parents at an age when their cancer-free counterparts are experiencing increasing independence (Baker & Syrjala, 2018). Coping with these stressors in addition to fearing disease recurrence or secondary malignancy, experiencing alterations in body image and cognition, and having feelings of vulnerability and emotional distress can negatively affect quality of life (Baker & Syrjala, 2018).

Survivorship care tailored to the specific needs and goals of AYAs is recommended (Jones et al., 2020). At Lehigh Valley Health Network Cancer Institute in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a gap in the provision of age-appropriate AYA survivorship care was identified. In addition, a concern that AYA survivors could be lost to follow-up was described. To address this care gap and concern, a survivorship clinic was developed for AYAs aged 18–39 years who were transitioning to long-term survivorship care.

Planning a Program

The current author, an oncology clinical nurse specialist (CNS), and a pediatric oncology social worker, both of the Lehigh Valley Health Network, met to discuss ideas for AYA survivorship. A literature