

Psycho-oncology Unit

Aron Goldhirsch, MD
Director

STAFF f.f. **Co-director:** Florence Didier, psychologist-psychotherapist
Consultant: Elena Scaffidi, psychologist-psychotherapist, Francesca Lupo, psychologist-psychotherapist
Fellow: Andrea Maldifassi, psychologist, Remo Bedolis, psychologist, Paola Arnaboldi-psychologist-student
Visitors: Ilaria Sabbatini, psychologist-student, Francesca Andreoli psychologist-student

Activities 2007. A brief crisis counselling, in an individual setting, for patient and family, is typically performed in order to reduce psychological distress and to enhance coping skills. Cognitive-behavioural interventions (including relaxation therapy, breathwork, guided imagery techniques) and expressive-supportive interventions are used by the psychologists of the Unit to help patients cope with the physical, emotional, social and existential impact of cancer. Couple and psychosexual problems are now included in the routine psychological assessment and discussed with the patient. A specific couple therapy or an individual sexual therapy are proposed when necessary.

Psycho-educational groups have been created dedicated to women who face cancer and its treatments. They are offered a psycho-educational program which includes a make-up group session (with the collaboration of the Association La Forza e il Sorriso) and successive supportive group and group relaxation therapy to enhance well-being, reduce stress and reinforce self-esteem.

Consultations are performed in the daily medical and surgical routine due to referral from physicians, nurses, family members and the palliative care team or due to the patient's self-referral. Two thousand and forty consultations were performed during 2007. Four hundred and forty new patients were referred to the Psycho-Oncology Unit. After the patient's discharge, a telephone follow-up is performed on a regular basis. In order to improve the psychological support to cancer patients and their families after discharge, we created a link with the national Foundation Gigi Ghirotti which provides psychological support by phone.

The Psycho-Oncology Unit is involved in several educational activities concerning the assessment and management of psychological distress in cancer patients, concerning stress management for oncology staff, concerning multidisciplinary team working.



Research interests

The psychological impact of breast surgery and oncological treatments

In collaboration with the Divisions of Senology (Dott. Luini), Reconstructive Plastic Surgery (Prof. Petit) and the Department of Medicine (Prof. Goldhirsch) the psychological and body image impact of breast loss and nipple preservation, satisfaction with cosmetic results of breast reconstruction and NAC preservation and its impact on sexuality are assessed along with its impact on fear of recurrence. This study is supported through a research grant by AVON. The impact of breast surgery and cancer treatments on sexuality is also assessed. We developed

specific questionnaires that needs to be validated. With the collaboration of the Division of Senology (Dr Luini, Dr Galimberti) we concluded a study to evaluate the psychological impact of “Sentinel-Node Biopsy” (BSN) technique, its impact on Quality of life.