Approximately half of all patients with terminal or advanced cancer suffer with poor mental health. Specifically, depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders plague people with advanced or terminal cancer. While half of terminally ill or advanced cancer patients suffer from depression, anxiety, and/or an adjustment disorder, less than half of cancer patients receive treatment for their mental health.

Death rates are as much as 25% higher in cancer patients who felt depressed and 39% higher in cancer patients who received a diagnosis of depression.

Depression is a disabling illness that affects about 15% to 25% of cancer patients. It affects men and women with cancer equally.

The relationship between cancer and depression is complex. Depression may be triggered by the diagnosis of cancer, other issues related to the cancer and its treatment, or the impact of the cancer on a person's life. However, depression may occur by chance or be related to other difficult events, either in the past or in the present, which have nothing to do with cancer, such as the loss of a loved one.

Cancers, especially breast cancer and lung cancer, are the second most common cause of death in people with schizophrenia, whose risk for cancer death is 50% higher than that of the general population. Possible explanations for these findings include a delay in diagnosis due to patients paying less attention to symptoms; the difficulty for schizophrenic patients to benefit from optimum treatment; and less compliance with treatment, the authors speculate.

Adequate recognition and treatment of depression in patients with cancer can enhance quality of life and help patients and families make the best use of their remaining time together. Since patients are often reluctant to describe their depressive symptoms, caregivers need to know how depression can be recognized.