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### Briefing Series on the Role of Psychology in Health Care *Pediatric Cancer*

- In the U.S., at least 12,000 children younger than age 15 are diagnosed with invasive cancer annually. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia is the most common diagnosis, with 2,400 cases identified yearly.
- Up to 40% of young cancer survivors may experience cognitive impairments linked to poor academic and vocational success, low self-esteem, and behavioral or emotional disorders.<sup>1</sup>
- About half of adolescents diagnosed with cancer may experience posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), such as intrusive thoughts, avoidance, and hyperarousal.<sup>2</sup> Intensive cancer treatment is associated with increased risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated 25 to 30% of child cancer survivors will not adjust well to their diagnosis and may experience significant long-term personal, family, and social difficulties.<sup>4</sup> More than two thirds report at least one chronic physical condition (e.g., cardiac or pulmonary) that impairs their functioning and quality of life.<sup>5</sup>
- Of all children diagnosed with cancer, about 85% will become long-term survivors and, on average, may expect to live an additional 66 years.<sup>6, 7</sup>

#### **| How Psychologists Can Help**

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that psychosocial services be provided to child cancer patients and their families at time of diagnosis.<sup>9</sup> Early identification and psychological intervention with distressed families serve to enhance the child cancer patient's long-term psychological, social, and academic functioning and to benefit the other family members as well.<sup>6, 7, 9</sup>
- Psychologists are able to identify adjustment difficulties; provide effective psychological interventions for depression, anxiety, and PTSS; and promote effective problem-solving for child cancer patients and their families in treatment and during survivorship.<sup>10</sup>
- Those psychologists with specialized training in neuropsychological assessment can evaluate child cancer patients, pre- and posttreatment, to detect and monitor any neurocognitive deficits that need to be addressed in treatment.
- Psychologists are also leaders in coordinating programs of psychosocial research and clinical practice within pediatric oncology.<sup>11, 12</sup>

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