

>>> Abstract Vortrag SFU Januar 2023

Roughly half a million people worldwide get diagnosed first time with cancer every year, with the tendency rising due to aging populations. In Germany, every third person is confronted with some type of cancer throughout their life span. Although the disease is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, many types can be cured if detected early and treated effectively. Beyond the medical aspects of cancer, the uprising field of psycho-oncology began to focus interdisciplinary on its psychosocial aspects in both patients and their caregivers. When diagnosed, many cancer patients and their environment are confronted with a life-threatening disease which can evoke emotions like fear, shock and disbelief. Existential questions and confrontation with mortality, worries about the own health and future and psychosocial distress throughout treatment and afterwards can often be accompanied by depressive symptoms and anxiety. Understanding how patients react psychologically to cancer is important to support their overall well-being and maximize quality of life across the cancer trajectory. Psycho-oncologists embedded in hospitals and in outpatient settings can provide such support by helping patients and their environment to cope with the disease, its burden and its consequences.

In this lecture I want to introduce you to the field of psycho-oncology with all its different aspects. You will gain insight on how psycho-oncologists work and what the challenges and positive aspects of this work can be. Also, I will shed some light on current scientific approaches and key questions in the field.

My interest in psycho-oncology grew early in the first semesters of my bachelor studies in psychology at SFU Berlin: through my voluntary work for the NGO "Make-A-Wish e.V.", whose aim it is to fulfil wishes of persons with life-threatening diseases, I wrote my bachelor thesis about imaginative processes of wish-fulfilment in a little girl suffering from cancer and her family. During my Master's in clinical psychology, still at SFU Berlin, I worked as an intern and wrote my master thesis at the psycho-oncology department of Charité Berlin. I was particularly interested in how therapy severity impacted a cancer patient's prognostic awareness.

After graduation, to further intensify my knowledge, I completed psycho-oncology training at ID-Institute in Kassel and attended an observership at Taussig Cancer Centre, Cleveland Clinic, USA. Currently, I am working on my PhD in the field of cancer prevention, i.e. the development of a proactive, automatized lifestyle intervention for general hospital patients, at University Medicine Greifswald.