

Familial Costs of Chemical Warfare

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Family is the closest point of contact to society for each patient and it is also the first group that is affected by problems due to chronic illnesses. In a family with a chronic illness, familial roles often undergo drastic changes, as the marital relationship between spouses is likely to resemble a caregiver and a patient relationship. This change in turn may result in other problems. It is known that a strong marital relationship may improve patients' health status (1). There are support groups for many chronic illnesses for spouses aiming to improve marital relationships (2). At present time there are more than 100,000 patients which are victims of chemical warfare (3). Many of them have a family and also maintain an active presence in the society. Unfortunately however there has been a lack of attention from both the government and other relevant organizations and research institutions to the social and familial costs of chemical warfare.

During the imposed Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) chemical warfare at large scale was used against Iranian soldiers and civilians (4,5). Many were killed as the result and still more were affected with various health issues (3). Morbidity in victims who survived has acute and chronic phases (6). Chronic problems due to chemical exposure affects eye (such as itching, photophobia, tearing, conjunctival and limbic problems and corneal abnormality) (7), lung (such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, bronchiectasis and pulmonary fibrosis) (8) and skin (such as itching, dry skin, hyper and hypo pigmentation) (9). It also causes various psychological problems (10). These chronic illnesses have long term implications for the victim as a long term morbid individual.

Until now researchers have mainly focused on symptoms and treatments for the physiological problems of chemical victims with some taking a closer look at the psychological aspects of the problem as

well. However the social aspects of the victims' problems as they interact with others are often neglected. Disabilities due to exposure with chemical warfare like other chronic illnesses can cause various problems in relationship with other parties involved. In the victim's family chronic illnesses may result in tension (11) and marital dissatisfaction (12).

This issue of the Journal of Family and Reproductive Health publishes an interesting article that discusses factors related to the marital relationships of chemical warfare veterans. We hope that this article serves as a starting point in studying familial problems due to chemical warfare exposure. Future marriage related research that focuses on the victims' problems including sexual issues is encouraged.

We look forward for future collaborations on studies about the familial cost of chemical warfare.

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