Mentally Ill Face Increased Cardiovascular Risk

**BY MARY ANN MOON**
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INDIANAPOLIS — Parents of children with inflammatory bowel disease perceive the effects of their children's illness more intensely than do the children themselves, according to Carin L. Cunningham, Ph.D.

"Treating physicians need to be aware of how the parents of children with inflammatory bowel disease are managing, because parental anxiety increases the child's anxiety," Dr. Cunningham said during a poster session at the annual meeting of the Midwest Society for Pediatric Research.

Parents fret that their children may not lead normal lives or participate in normal activities, or that they may not be able to start a family of their own, Dr. Cunningham said in an interview.

"These concerns are most prevalent among parents who do not have IBD themselves," explained Dr. Cunningham, a pediatric psychologist at the Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital and Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

The study examined the health-related quality of life (HRQOL) of children and adolescents with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), compared with the HRQOL of physically healthy peers, with emphasis on the effects of IBD and steroidal side effects.

The HRQOL scores of 49 children and adolescents (aged 10-18 years) with IBD, compared with 49 healthy (peers) who were recruited from the same setting, Dr. Cunningham and her associates noted.

There are alternative interpretations of the discrepant findings between parent versus child reports of the impact of IBD on HRQOL, according to the investigators. "It is possible that children and adolescents with IBD are coping relatively well with the stressors of their condition and are not experiencing a significant impact of IBD-related problems on their HRQOL."

Another possibility is that young people may deny or minimize the impact of IBD.

The study also found that:

- Caregivers of children with IBD reported that their children's physical and psychological health was more limited and that they experienced more worry and greater interference with their personal time, compared with caregivers of healthy children.
- Children and adolescents with IBD reported worse HRQOL than physically healthy children in only one domain, that of general health.

Improvements in HRQOL were greatest in children who experienced more frequent IBD-related symptoms together with symptoms of steroidal side effects.

This suggests that children on steroids suffer the most, Dr. Cunningham said. "They become cushingoid, they gain weight, and may deny or minimize the impact of IBD."

"The reasons why severe mental illness puts people at higher risk of CVD mortality remain unclear. It is possible that mentally ill patients may be less likely to present with CVD symptoms, to be correctly diagnosed, to be given correct treatment, and to adhere to treatment," the researchers said.

These findings underscore the fact that people with severe mental illness must be monitored for somatic conditions, the investigators said.

"Psychiatric care professionals cannot be viewed as exempt from responsibility for physical health monitoring," Dr. Cunningham and his associates noted.