Cancer and intellectual disabilities; current knowledge

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Background

Approximately 1.5% of the population in western countries is diagnosed with an intellectual disability (ID). ID is characterized by limitations in cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior with onset during childhood. Besides care needs directly emerging from the disability, are people with ID overrepresented in chronic disease groups, challenged in maintaining healthy lifestyles, and limited in health literacy and other health (decision-making) skills. This has impact for (preventive) cancer care as well, but knowledge among care professionals in this area is limited.

Methods

An overview is given of key findings from literature reviews, and population studies on the entire cancer spectrum in relation to ID.

Impact on practice

Results indicate care providers in both primary care and oncology care need to be aware of the following:

1) Some (genetic) ID syndromes include elevated risks for tumor development;

2) The age- and sex-group specific cancer incidence in the ID population is different from what is known from the general population;

3) People with ID experience barriers in (timely) accessing preventative care, screening, and cancer treatment;

4) People with ID die more often from cancer, and at younger ages than people without ID.

Discussion

Disability inclusive cancer care may require adjustments to routine care, although knowledge to design such adjustments is scarce. Improving awareness for the specific needs of the ID population as presented here is a first step towards more equitable cancer care.