ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study attempts to assess the psycho-social problems in terminally ill cancer patients and explore intervention strategies.

**Methodology:** 200 terminally ill cancer patients were selected from a diverse socio-economic population using purposive sampling from two leading oncology hospitals in Thrissur namely Amala Medical College & Research Institute and Government Medical College, Thrissur. The design used is descriptive. This is a qualitative cum quantitative study in which standardized tools are used.

**Findings:** Depression has no single cause; often it results from a combination of factors. The factors for depression observed in the study are family burden due to exorbitant treatment expenditure, physical discomfort mainly pain, frequent mood fluctuation and the use of inappropriate coping strategies. Patients in their initial phase were found to be more depressed. Age and gender bears no significance in depression.

**Conclusion:** The underlying social and psychological distress is multifarious. Early intervention to treat sub clinical anxiety and depression may prevent subsequent psychosocial distress. People in the terminal stage of cancer should not be pressured into adopting a particular coping style to improve survival.

**Suggestion:** Controlled research assessing the effect of spiritual based intervention is needed to establish what method of help can engender a sense of peace and meaning. A personalized approach
would not only help to treat the emotional and social aspects of those living with cancer, but also provide considerable long term cost saving and prevent the over burdening of the health care system.

**Key words:** Cancer, Terminal illness, Depression, Family burden, Social support, Coping strategy.