

# ChatGPT as a Way to Enhance Parents' Communication in Cases of Oncological Pediatric Diseases

## Onkolojik Pediatrik Hastalıklarda Ebeveynlerin İletişimini Geliştirmenin Bir Yolu Olarak ChatGPT

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### To the Editor,

It is easy to talk to a young child about leukemia if one has help. From Türkiye, Yaşar et al. [1] recently published a study in this journal involving 100 children and their parents concerning the children's leukemia diagnoses and found that 16 children (16%) were not aware of the diagnosis but wished they had been [1]. I was surprised to read that 13 (82%) of those 16 leukemia patients were young children (<7 years old). The stated reason for the nondisclosure of a leukemia diagnosis to children was the doctor's respect of parents' wishes to protect their children [1]. The literature also mentions that doctors believe that telling a child about an illness could hurt the family more than it helps [2].

As a physician myself, I understand this view, since delivering bad news is not an easy task, and comprehensive training in this regard is often lacking within various clinical contexts [3]. However, by not being able to deliver bad news, physicians are hindering patients and their families from appropriately adapting to their medical circumstances [4,5]. The children's need to receive leukemia information at the time of diagnosis (including the term "leukemia," information about treatment and hospitalization, and their benefits and challenges) was also found in a Japanese study [5]. Interestingly, both the Japanese [5] and Turkish [1] studies noted parents' inclination to withhold information to safeguard their children, believing that such a diagnosis could be overly upsetting [5].

Open dialogue might better contribute to the well-being of children with cancer, as not disclosing the prognosis on its own does not necessarily ensure family stability [2]. Labeling a child's illness as cancer is crucial as it fosters trust, promotes involvement in medical discussions, reduces confusion, avoids

outside sources revealing the diagnosis, and encourages better cooperation with tests and treatments [6]. Hence, how can parents receive guidance on discussing a leukemia diagnosis with a child under 7 years old? Traditionally, information resources such as websites from respected medical organizations (e.g., the American Society of Clinical Oncology's www.cancer.net) have been employed to assist patients with cancer, families, and caregivers in understanding their medical situations. For instance, Cancer.Net offers guidance on addressing cancer with preschoolers [7]. Nowadays, however, the increasing availability of artificial intelligence chatbots such as ChatGPT is gaining significance in the medical domain [8], as they can aid in constructing responses to patient inquiries [9]. This provides parents with the opportunity to utilize such tools to facilitate improved communication with their children.

When ChatGPT-3.5 was asked to give an example of "what to tell a child of less than 7 years old and considering the diagnosis to be leukemia?" it provided the output depicted in Table 1.

Analyzing Table 1, it is evident that ChatGPT composed a text suitable for the child's age, providing clear explanations of leukemia in simple terms and reassuring the child that he or she will not be alone in the hospital. These are all crucial points for young children coping with cancer [6]. It is important to state, however, that the text presented in Table 1 is only suitable for children above 3 years old since younger ones are not likely to understand cancer [6].

I believe that ChatGPT will not take the place of doctors, but it can be a helpful member of the healthcare team, collaborating with doctors to enhance parents' education and communication on sensitive topics such as oncological pediatric diseases.

**Table 1. ChatGPT-3.5 output when asked to give an example of "what to tell a child of less than 7 years old and considering the diagnosis to be leukemia?"**

"Hi sweetie,  
I want to talk to you about something important. You know how sometimes our bodies have little parts called cells that help us grow and stay healthy? Well, your body has some cells that are being a little bit different, and that's why you're not feeling quite right. The doctors found out that you have something called 'leukemia.' It's like a special name for those tricky cells that need some help getting better. We're going to have a superhero team of doctors and nurses who will give you special medicine and treatments to make those tricky cells go away.  
You might need to go to a special place called a hospital sometimes so that the doctors can take really good care of you. But guess what? I'll be right there with you the whole time, and we can bring your favorite toys and books to play with.  
It's okay to feel a little tired or different during this time. Your body is working hard to feel better, and we'll do everything we can to help it. We'll have lots of hugs, kisses, and cuddles to make you feel better too.  
Remember, you're not alone in this journey. Our family and friends love you so much, and we're all here to support you and help you get strong again. If you have any questions or if something doesn't feel right, you can always tell me. We're a team, and we'll go through this together, step by step.  
You're such a brave and amazing little one, and I'm so proud of you. We'll take things one day at a time, and before you know it, you'll be feeling much better.  
I love you more than you can imagine, and I'm here for you always."

**Keywords:** Personal communication, Medical oncology, Leukemia, Child

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kişisel iletişim, Tıbbi onkoloji, Lösemi, Çocuk

## Ethics

**Informed Consent:** Not applicable.

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### Reply from the Authors,

We previously published a study titled "Assessment of the knowledge, attitudes, anxiety, and coping strategies of pediatric patients and parents after leukemia diagnosis in Türkiye" in this journal in May 2023 [1]. Due to the lack of awareness of leukemia, we discussed how to disclose a leukemia diagnosis to small children under the age of 7. I have read the letter shared here titled "ChatGPT as a way to enhance parents' communication in oncological pediatric diseases." The author of this letter referenced our earlier findings regarding the lack of awareness of leukemia diagnosis in children under the age of 7 [1]. According to the author, ChatGPT is an artificial intelligence chatbot that enables doctors or parents to easily communicate with pediatric oncology patients under the age of 7. In this letter, published above, Table 1 shows the author's ChatGPT output for children aged 3 to 7 years. We completely agree with the author's conclusion that ChatGPT is a valuable tool for healthcare teams in increasing parents' understanding and communication about challenging subjects such as pediatric cancer. The author, however, did not specify how to inform young children diagnosed with leukemia under the age of 7 after they have grown. In our research, we focused on this

specific topic. There were 100 children in our study. At the time of the study, 84 of the pediatric patients were aware of their leukemia diagnosis, but the remaining 16 were not. Thirteen (82%) of the 16 patients were under the age of 7 when they were diagnosed. Parallel to these preliminary findings, we later discussed how children under the age of 3 did not understand the concept of being sick, but those aged 3-6 years understood the distinction between being well and being sick, and those older than 7 were aware of cancer [2]. As a result, all of these data suggest that information about leukemia diagnoses in young children under the age of 7 should be updated once chemotherapy is completed at older ages. We believe ChatGPT strategies could be modified for children over the age of 7 who have completed leukemia treatment.

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