Immunity and Loss

Name

Institution

Date

**What role does immunity play when caring for a patient that is experiencing a high amount of stress due to a loss?**

For most people, stress in life is normal due to the fact that people experience different encounters in life. Stress may last for years, for instance when one is taking care of a terminally-ill loved one or when dealing with the loss of a loved one. At times, especially after a loss, stress can be extremely overwhelming to a patient and take a toll on his/her immune system (Boerner, Schulz & Horowitz, 2004).

Stress is normally associated with life events that exceed one’s ability to cope. For this reason, the body of a person experiencing a high amount of stress as a result of a loss produces high levels of the stress-hormone cortisol. Short spurts of cortisol boost the immunity of a person by curbing inflammation. However, with time, the body gets used to the cortisol and gives room for inflammation. This also occurs because the quantity of lymphocytes is lower, which seriously interferes with the patient’s immunity (Ho et al, 2010). In the long term, the immune system becomes over-worked and therefore the patient is exposed to infections.

During stressful moments, immunity is reduced and the patient’s ability to fight-off antigens is minimized. For this reason, the patient is more prone to illnesses. Other effects on the patient include severe headaches, depression, colds/flu, anxiety, and severe chest pain (angina). One study shows that loss of loved ones among older people results to lower immunity, when compared to people who have not experienced any loss (Ho et al, 2010).

**References**

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Ho, R. C., Neo, L. F., Chua, A. N., Cheak, A. A., & Mak, A. (2010). Research on psychoneuroimmunology: does stress influence immunity and cause coronary artery disease. *Ann Acad Med Singapore*, *39*(3), 191-6.