**Distress linked to cancer risk**

People who suffer from anxiety or depression have an increased risk of dying from several forms of cancer, new research has suggested. The meta-analysis of 16 cohort studies looked at how the total 163,363 participants had rated their levels of mental distress at one point in time, and then followed up what happened to them over the next ten years – including whether they’d died of cancer. The researchers found that people who had reported having the highest levels of distress were 32% more likely to have died from one of five types of cancer (including pancreatic cancer and leukaemia) than those with the lowest levels. There is growing evidence that psychological stress has an impact on physical health. However, the findings do not mean that unhappiness causes cancer: it could be that people in mental distress eat unhealthily – and poor diet is linked to cancer; or that they don’t attend cancer screenings, leading to delayed diagnoses; or that they fail to follow up their treatment. It could also be that people feel depressed because their general health is poor, which in turn, reduce their chances of surviving cancer.

The Week

4th February 2017