

Study Summary

The “sphere of care”: A qualitative study of colorectal cancer patient and caregiver experiences of support within the cancer treatment setting

Law E, Levesque JV, Lambert S, Girgis A. PloS One. 2018;13(12):e0209436.

Conclusion

Both patients and their caregivers highly value positive relationships with healthcare professionals during treatment of colorectal cancer. Competence, kindness and compassion underpin these relationships, and can be strengthened by enhancing communication skills through a dedicated program and developing pathways that support patients and caregivers within their treatment context

Study Aim

To understand how social support for patients with colorectal cancer and their caregivers impacts their treatment experience and how support could be better facilitated within the treatment setting.

Methods

- Adult patients with colorectal cancer who had completed radiotherapy treatment within the last four months and caregivers of these patients were recruited to undergo a one-on-one interview in an Australian hospital
- Interview questions focused on participants' experience of social support regarding cancer treatment
- The interview structure was based on a predefined framework which was developed following a literature review of the topic
- Authors analysed interview responses to extract key data from each participant, identify overarching patterns across all participants and refine these findings to common themes related to their social support experience



High quality research was facilitated by:

- Flexible interviewing to explore all participants' experiences (including negative cases)
- Transparent data collection, management and analysis
- Identifying transferability of experiences by relating the findings to other studies

Results

Twelve patients and eight caregivers participated in the study. Their experiences were categorised into three themes:

Support from the treatment team

The treatment team, including nurses, doctors and health staff, were the most common form of social support, providing:



This made the treatment team more approachable and enhanced their communication with patients, as well as encouraging questions.



The treatment team was expected to acknowledge both the patient and caregiver alike, and this relationship could be strengthened through:

- A communication skills training program for all treatment team members to improve communication of patient-centred goals
- The development of pathways to assist with meeting the information and support needs of patients and caregivers

Support from the treatment team is particularly important for patients with advanced colorectal cancer due to the complexity of treatment and private nature of the side-effects experienced.

Change in existing support

Patients and caregivers acknowledged that cancer had a negative impact on multiple aspects of life, including:



Different dimensions of support

Patients and caregivers recognised the variety of the support they received.

