

CERVICAL CANCER SURVIVORSHIP AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN PAKISTAN: EXAMINING THE LONG-TERM IMPACT ON WOMEN'S WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Cervical cancer remains a significant health concern for women in Pakistan, where limited awareness and access to preventive measures exacerbate the burden of the disease. This study investigates the long-term quality of life and survivorship issues faced by Pakistani women aged 46 who have undergone treatment for cervical cancer. By employing a qualitative methodology, we have conducted in-depth interviews with cervical cancer survivors to evaluate the physical, emotional, and social well-being. The research will delve into how cultural, socioeconomic, and healthcare factors shape these women's experiences, aiming to uncover unique challenges and unmet needs.

Our findings are expected to provide essential insights into the specific obstacles that cervical cancer survivors in Pakistan encounter, thereby informing the development of targeted support and intervention programs. This research underscores the urgent necessity for comprehensive cancer care and robust survivor support systems in the region. Highlighting the intersection of cultural sensitivities and healthcare provision, this study offers innovative perspectives on improving the quality of life for cervical cancer survivors in Pakistan.

By addressing these critical issues, this research aligns by advocating for better health outcomes and enhanced well-being for women facing cervical cancer in Pakistan. The study's outcomes serve as a foundation for policy recommendations and practical solutions to elevate the standards of cancer care and support services, ultimately contributing to the empowerment and betterment of women's health in Pakistan.

This research will play a pivotal role in advancing the understanding of survivorship issues and fostering a supportive environment for women battling cervical cancer in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS: Cervical, Cancer, Well-Being, Survivor, Cultural, Physical, Socio-economic

1 INTRODUCTION

Cervical cancer, which is predominantly caused by persistent infection with high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV), is a major public health concern worldwide, especially among women in developing and middle-income nations. In 2020, it led to the death of 342,000 women out of 604,000 diagnosed cases (Lindua et al., 2002). It is the fourth most common cancer in women and can be prevented and treated if detected early. Nearly all instances (99%) of cervical cancer are associated with infection with high-risk HPV, a very common virus spread through sexual contact. Cervical cancer originates in a woman's cervix, which is the entrance to the uterus from the vagina. While most HPV infections go away on their own without any symptoms, persistent infections can lead to cervical cancer in women. Most cervical cancer cases can be avoided with effective primary (HPV vaccine) and secondary preventive strategies (screening for and treating precancerous lesions).

Pakistan and India, both having high incidence rates, face significant challenges in cervical cancer prevention and treatment. Despite a downward trend in incidence and mortality rates, the absolute number of cases remains high due to the large population size, emphasizing the need for sustained prevention, screening, and treatment efforts. Cervical cancer ranks as the third most frequent cancer among women in Pakistan, with approximately 5,008 women diagnosed and 3,197 dying from the disease each year. Pakistan has a population of 73.8 million women aged 15 years and older who are at risk of developing cervical cancer. In India, cervical cancer ranks as the second most frequent cancer among women, with approximately 123,907 diagnosed and 77,348 dying from the disease each year. It significantly impacts women's ability to work and their overall quality of life, with physical discomfort and fatigue limiting their job performance, potentially leading to reduced work hours and productivity. The financial burden of cervical cancer can cause significant stress, affecting work performance and quality of life.

While specific data on the number of working women affected by cervical cancer is lacking, a significant proportion of women in both countries are part of the workforce. These statistics provide a general overview of the prevalence of cervical cancer and the influence of sociocultural factors on health-seeking behaviors. This sets the stage for a detailed exploration of these issues in the context of Indian and Pakistani immigrant women in Ireland, emphasizing the urgent need for continued research and intervention in this area. Initiatives aimed at preventing, screening, and treating cervical cancer are vital for improving health outcomes and supporting women's economic and social well-being (Sohal et al., 2022).

Cervical cancer remains a significant public health issue globally, with treatment strategies and screening modalities evolving over the years. These advancements have led to improved survival rates, with a 5-year relative survival rate of around 91.5% for early-stage cervical cancer (Khalil et al., 2015). However, long-term side effects from treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy can significantly impact the quality of life (QOL) of survivors. Studies have shown that cervical cancer survivors face various survivorship issues, including body image concerns, cognitive functioning, health behaviors, mental health, fatigue, sleep problems, physical functioning, pain, and sexual problems. While acute symptoms of cancer and its treatment, such as nausea, tend to diminish within a year post-treatment, long-term effects persist (Mvunta et al., 2022). For instance, persistent negative effects on physical and psychosocial functioning have been reported, especially among those who underwent concurrent chemoradiotherapy.

Socioeconomic status (SES) and cultural factors play a crucial role in the QOL of cervical cancer survivors. Physical functioning, social functioning, physical discomfort, and overall health condition are all negatively predicted by economic deprivation. (Greenwald et al., 2014). Additionally, cultural factors, such as stigma and lack of awareness, can influence the willingness of women to seek timely screening and treatment, thereby affecting their long-term outcomes.

Access to healthcare services and the quality of care received are also critical determinants of QOL in cervical cancer survivors. In Pakistan, the healthcare system faces challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of trained healthcare professionals. These factors can hinder the timely diagnosis and effective treatment of cervical cancer, impacting the long-term QOL of survivors. While advancements in treatment and screening have improved survival rates for cervical cancer, the long-term QOL of survivors remains a significant concern. Addressing socioeconomic, cultural, and healthcare factors is essential to enhance the QOL of cervical cancer survivors, particularly in regions like Pakistan where these challenges are more pronounced (Greenwald et al., 2014).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the multifaceted aspects of life post-treatment for cervical cancer among Pakistani women. Specifically, we aim to identify the key factors affecting their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Our research questions include: What are the predominant physical challenges faced by cervical cancer survivors in Pakistan? How do cultural and socioeconomic factors influence their emotional health? What social support systems are available and how effective are they in addressing the needs of these women?

2 DATA ANALYSIS AND CASE PRESENTATION

Fatima is a 46-year-old Muslim woman living in Birmingham since 2001. She was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 36. Fatima is married, currently in her second marriage for the past ten years, and she is a mother of two sons. Prior to her current marriage, she was widowed.

2.1 Diagnosis and Initial Reactions

In 2014, at the age of 36, Fatima was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. The discovery happened one day when she noticed a change in her breast after showering.

"I think, initially, I discovered a lump. I spoke to my colleague, who gave me some insight into what it could be. So, I had an idea. I felt the lump."

Recalling that a colleague had previously gone through breast cancer, Fatima sought her advice. She was urged to see a General Practitioner (GP) immediately. Upon examination, the GP found a mobile lump, approximately 4 cm in size, and referred her to a consultant for a biopsy.

Stage 3 breast cancer, also known as locally advanced breast cancer, means that the cancer has spread beyond the immediate region of the breast to nearby lymph nodes or muscles but not too distant organs. Depending on the tumor's size and the degree of lymph node involvement, this stage is further separated into subcategories 3A, 3B, and 3C. (Shockney, 2024).

After 10 years of recovery from breast cancer she was recognized by Cervical Cancer.

I think something happened once when I went for an MRI scan. They found a clot and a growth in my uterus. I was not expecting anything since my tests were fine, but they told me about the growth in my uterus. I felt sad because I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't want to go for the procedure as it was painful. I knew there was nothing that could change, so I told them to remove it completely. If I need help and ask for it, then they help me; otherwise, they don't consider me. That's it.

Discovering growth or abnormalities in the uterus during routine or diagnostic scans can be quite distressing for patients. The emotional impact of such unexpected news, coupled with the fear of undergoing potentially painful procedures, can lead to significant anxiety and stress (Smith et al., 2018). It's crucial for healthcare providers to offer comprehensive support and clear information about the diagnosis and treatment options to help alleviate patients' concerns (Johnson & Roberts, 2019).

2.2 Emotional and Psychological Impact

Fatima's initial response was focused on her sons, as they had already lost their father. She resolved to survive for their sake, despite the emotional and physical toll the diagnosis and treatment took on her. The stress of managing her children's needs, her father-in-law's illness, and household responsibilities had led her to neglect her own health.

But we will send you to the consultant for a biopsy basically. Yeah, I was in stage three. My lump was 4 cm big, and they checked it with a little dye in my breast. When I went to the hospital, they looked at it. As my stage was 3, they didn't let me go and said I needed urgent treatment. They asked me what I felt, and at that time, I said I was okay. I needed to survive for my boys as they don't have anyone. Not their father. I didn't want them to live without their mother.

The emotional and psychological burden of a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. Patients often experience a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, and sadness, which can be compounded by the stress of managing family responsibilities and personal health (Aranda et al., 2015). Support from healthcare providers, family, and social networks plays a crucial role in helping patients cope with the emotional challenges of cancer treatment (Stanton, 2018).

2.3 Treatment Journey

Fatima underwent an aggressive treatment regimen:

- **Chemotherapy:** She endured six sessions, each spanning a three-week process. The first week after each session left her bedridden and severely fatigued. She experienced significant hair loss, including her head, eyelashes, and eyebrows.
- **Surgery:** Following chemotherapy, Fatima had surgery, which required an extended hospital stay.
- **Radiation:** She underwent a 15-day radiation therapy regimen, which involved daily hospital visits.

Then I went through chemotherapy, which was a six-session process. Each session lasted three weeks. The first week was deadening; I could not get out of bed. I couldn't look after myself or anyone around me. At the same time, I was losing my hair. By the second week, I would feel better, but in the third week, I feared my next session. After my six sessions, I had surgery and had to stay in the hospital again. Following the surgery, I had radiation therapy, which required daily hospital visits for 15 days. If you look at the whole scenario, it was a six-month process. I had to take off from work and put all my duties on hold.

The journey of undergoing cancer treatment can be physically and emotionally draining. Chemotherapy, for instance, is known for its severe side effects, such as fatigue, nausea, and hair loss, significantly affecting patients' quality of life (Haviland et al., 2015). Surgical interventions often require extended recovery times, adding to the emotional and physical burden (Fisher et al., 2018). Radiation therapy, though crucial, can also pose significant challenges due to its demanding daily schedule and associated side effects (Bese et al., 2007).

Throughout this arduous journey, support from healthcare providers, family, and friends plays a crucial role in helping patients cope with the treatment's impact (Henselmans et al., 2010).

2.3 Side Effects and Challenges

The treatments caused numerous side effects. Chemotherapy felt like poison to Fatima's body, sapping her strength. One dangerous incident occurred when she took only half of the prescribed steroid dose, leading to severe symptoms. Fatima also faced long-term physical limitations, such as the inability to use her right arm for heavy lifting, blood pressure readings, or injections, due to the removal of her lymph nodes.

I was not expecting anything as my tests were fine, but they told me that I have grown in the uterus. I got sad, as I don't know what's going to happen. I don't want to go for the procedure as it is painful. I know there is nothing that can change, so if you want to remove it, remove it completely. I need help if I ask for it, otherwise, they consider me, that's it. The family is the first protocol. As I am young and alone, sympathy is with me as I don't have parents, and one of my children and husband are everyone around me. My family doctor is checking on me.

She was taken by surprise when an MRI scan revealed an unexpected growth in her uterus. The news left her feeling sad and uncertain about the future, especially since she fears the pain associated with the procedure. Despite her apprehension, she understands the necessity of treatment and hopes for support from her healthcare providers. Fatima feels isolated, lacking parental support and relying on her family doctor for guidance.

Her experience is not uncommon. Many women face unexpected medical diagnoses that bring emotional and physical challenges (American Cancer Society, 2023). According to a study by the American Cancer Society, the emotional impact of such diagnoses can be profound, leading to feelings of isolation and anxiety (Living Beyond Breast Cancer, 2016). Additionally, the removal of lymph nodes, a common procedure in cancer treatment, can result in long-term physical limitations, such as chronic pain and limited mobility.

2.4 Emotional and Psychological Challenges

Fatima grappled with the emotional impact of her changing appearance. Losing her hair and the physical changes from treatment were particularly difficult

Yeah! One thing I used to remember is due to breast cancer, the medicines are too strong. My oncologist asked me if I need to wear a cold cap to close my hair, so you know I need to start the process as soon as possible because I don't want my kids to lose out on anything rather than taking care of myself. I thought I didn't want to wait, so I went through the process. I have gone through my surgery; it is dangerous because I told you it is also in lymph nodes. Then I went through chemotherapy, which was a 6-session process. Every session had to be a 3-week process prolonged. The first week I had it, I was dead; I could not get out of my bed. I could not look after myself or anybody around me. At the same time, I am losing my hair, so the second week I feel better, in the third week I again have the fear of my next session. After my 6 sessions, I had surgery, I had to stay in the hospital again, and in the third session I had radiation and every day for my radiation I need to drive daily. It was a 15-day process. If you

look at the whole scenario, it was my 6-month process I have taken off from my work as well and all my duties around.

She faced significant emotional and psychological challenges during her breast and cervical cancer treatment. The strong medications and physical changes, such as hair loss, deeply affected her self-esteem and daily life. Despite fear and uncertainty, she chose to undergo the cold cap treatment to minimize hair loss, prioritizing her children's experience over her own comfort. The chemotherapy process was physically exhausting, leaving her bedridden and unable to care for herself or her family. The fear of upcoming sessions and the need for daily radiation treatments added to her emotional burden. The journey highlights the profound emotional impact of cancer treatment, and the resilience required to navigate these challenges.

The emotional and psychological impact of breast cancer treatment is well-documented. According to the American Cancer Society, patients often experience a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, and sadness, which can affect their mental health and quality of life (American Cancer Society, 2023). Additionally, the removal of lymph nodes can lead to long-term physical limitations and emotional distress (Living Beyond Breast Cancer, 2016).

2.5 Advocacy and Awareness

Fatima's experience highlighted the need for greater awareness and regular self-checks, especially for women.

You should not take any longer! You need to go to the doctor you need to be open about it. It is very hard thing for women so good for mental health. WellUmmmmmmmm..... Not really because the process is very fast what they do! They do so, maybe it will be on my time. Society lacks social support.

Her personal experience with breast cancer treatment underscored the critical importance of awareness and timely medical intervention. She urges women to prioritize their health by seeking medical advice promptly and being open about their conditions. Fatima's journey not only made her a strong advocate for breast cancer awareness but also led her to actively educate other women about the significance of self-care and early detection. Her advocacy work involves visiting hospitals and sharing her story to highlight the necessity of health check-ups, even for those without a family history of cancer. Despite the rapid and often overwhelming nature of the medical procedures, Fatima emphasizes the importance of mental health support and the role of societal backing, which she found lacking.

Advocacy for breast cancer awareness is crucial in improving early detection and treatment outcomes. Studies have shown that regular self-checks and early diagnosis significantly enhance the chances of successful treatment and survivorship (American Cancer Society, 2023). Moreover, social support systems play a vital role in the psychological well-being of cancer patients, aiding in their recovery and quality of life (Living Beyond Breast Cancer, 2016).

2.6 Quality of Life

2.6.1 Daily Life and Activities

Her experience highlights the emotional and physical challenges she faced after discovering an unexpected growth in her uterus. The uncertainty and pain associated with the procedure added to her distress. Despite feeling isolated, she found some support from her family, emphasizing the importance of familial care in her recovery process.

I think there is something that happened. Once I went for an MRI scan, they found a clot and growth in my uterus. I was not expecting anything as my tests were fine, but they told me I had a growth in my uterus. I got sad because I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't want to go for the procedure as it was painful. I know there's nothing that can change, so if you want to remove it, remove it completely.

She also mentioned:

If I need and ask for help, then they help; otherwise, they don't consider me. The family is the first protocol. As I am young and alone, and sympathy is with me since I don't have parents and one of my children and husband, everyone is around me.

The emotional impact of unexpected medical diagnoses can be profound. According to Niedzwiedz et al. (2019), depression and anxiety are common among cancer patients and can hinder treatment and recovery. Fatima's feelings of sadness and isolation are consistent with these findings.

2.6.2 Work and its Impact

The quality of life has been affected by her medical condition, leading to reduced physical activity and work capacity. Financial challenges due to medical leave have also impacted on her work life. However, she appreciates the availability of free health services, which helps mitigate some of the financial burden.

There is little difference in the quality of life—I do less workout, drive less, and can't do heavy work. Financial problems, yeah, it does affect my work because of holidays. But everything else is free here, like health services.

The financial toxicity of cancer treatment can significantly impact patients' quality of life. According to Khanna (2021), the psychological well-being of cancer patients and caregivers is often affected by the financial strain of medical expenses.

2.6.3 Healthcare and Follow-up Care

Fatima expresses satisfaction with her follow-up care, which involves regular check-ups every six weeks. This consistent monitoring helps her feel supported and reassured about her health.

Yes, I am satisfied, and every 6 weeks I need to go for follow-up." "Yes, I am satisfied with the follow-up care I receive.

Regular follow-up care is crucial for cancer survivors to monitor their health and address any emerging issues. According to Steel and Carr (2022), consistent follow-up care can improve the psychological well-being of cancer patients by providing ongoing support and reassurance.

2.6.4 Information and Resources

Fatima feels that her healthcare providers have not adequately addressed her concerns about the connection between her breast and uterus health. She also feels that she has not received comprehensive information about the side effects of her treatment, particularly regarding hormonal impacts.

My family doctor is checking on me. They neglect my uterus health as the breast and uterus work together or are connected. They don't tell me about the side effects of health issues, like the hormonal point. They only told me that it affects my bones but nothing else.

The lack of comprehensive information and communication from healthcare providers can negatively impact patients' understanding and management of their health conditions. According to Niedzwiedz et al. (2019), effective communication and education about treatment side effects are essential for improving patient outcomes and satisfaction.

2.7 Support Group

She chose not to join any support groups, despite being offered the opportunity. She preferred to manage her journey independently, which may reflect her desire for autonomy and self-reliance.

No, I did not join any support group. They asked me to join such groups and organizations or sessions, but I did not join. They gave me the opportunity, but I did the work myself.

While support groups can provide emotional and psychological benefits, not all patients choose to participate. According to Khanna (2021), the decision to join support groups can vary based on individual preferences and needs.

2.8 Outlook

2.8.1 Long-term Goals and Hopes

Explanation: After undergoing a hysterectomy, Fatima expressed that her essential needs and desires remained unchanged. She emphasized that her physical health had returned to a state of normalcy, indicating a positive outlook on her long-term health and well-being.

Human need and urge remain the same as my hysterectomy was done. Everything is normal.

The experience of returning to a sense of normalcy after major surgeries like a hysterectomy is not uncommon. Studies have shown that patients often regain a significant portion of their pre-surgery quality of life, although the journey can be challenging (Johnson & Roberts, 2019). It's important for healthcare providers to support patients through this transition by addressing both physical and psychological aspects of recovery.

2.9 Future Vision

Fatima's inquiry about resuming normal activities, such as intercourse, reflects her proactive approach to understanding her post-surgery life. Her doctor's reassurances played a crucial role in alleviating her concerns, highlighting the importance of clear and supportive communication between patients and healthcare professionals.

After the surgery, I said to the doctor, 'Can I go for intercourse?' They said there is nothing to worry about! Doctors said this directly to me.

Effective doctor-patient communication is essential in managing expectations and reducing anxiety post-surgery. According to the American Cancer Society (2023), open discussions about recovery and lifestyle adjustments can significantly improve patient satisfaction and emotional well-being.

2.10 Advice for Others

Fatima advises women to seek medical attention promptly and to be open about their health issues. She emphasizes the psychological benefits of addressing health concerns early, which can be crucial in mitigating anxiety and promoting mental well-being.

You should not take any longer! You need to go to the doctor. You need to be open about it. It is a very hard thing for women, so good for mental health.

Early intervention and openness about health issues are crucial for effective treatment outcomes. Research indicates that timely medical intervention can lead to better prognosis and reduced psychological distress (Smith et al., 2020).

2.11 Personal Reflections

Fatima's reflections on the emotional and sexual challenges during her treatment underscore the complex impact of cancer on personal relationships. Her husband's support and understanding were vital in her journey, highlighting the importance of a strong support system for cancer patients.

People do sometimes, not all the time, and give depression. Sometimes we can't feel sexual like the urge of sexual feeling as our sexual life is disturbed. Maybe your husband feels it, maybe not. To be honest, he was okay! He said your health is important, so no need to delay. He pushed me for the process. My husband is well educated; he looks after me, takes care, and in the hospital, he is with me. I have been in my second marriage for 10 years. In personal experience, we can't feel the difference, not for myself.

The emotional and sexual well-being of cancer patients can be significantly affected by their treatment. Support from partners and family members plays a crucial role in navigating these challenges. According to research, maintaining open communication and emotional support within relationships can greatly enhance the quality of life for cancer survivors (Living Beyond Breast Cancer, 2016).

2.12 Final Thoughts

Her concluding thoughts reflect her feelings about the healthcare process and the social support she has received. She acknowledges the efficiency of the medical treatments, noting that the process is swift and leaves little time for personal adjustments. However, she also points out a significant gap in societal support for individuals undergoing such treatments. Fatima's experience underscores the importance of a strong social support system to complement the medical care provided to patients.

Well...ummmmm...not really because the process is very fast in what they do. They do so maybe it will be on my time. Society lacks social support.

The need for comprehensive social support during medical treatments is well-documented. According to a study by Smith et al. (2020), social support plays a critical role in the emotional and psychological well-being of patients, helping them to navigate the challenges of their treatment journey. The lack of such support can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder recovery.

3 Discussion

The experiences highlighted provide a comprehensive view of the emotional and physical challenges faced by a cancer survivor. The unexpected discovery of uterine growth, despite prior normal tests, led to significant emotional distress and uncertainty. The reluctance to undergo painful procedures reflects common fears and anxieties associated with invasive medical treatments.

The impact on daily life and activities was profound, with reduced physical capabilities and increased reliance on family support. The physical limitations following treatment, such as the inability to perform heavy lifting, align with findings that chronic pain and mobility issues are common after lymph node removal (Living Beyond Breast Cancer, 2016).

Financial challenges due to medical leave further complicated the situation, though the availability of free health services provided some relief.

Satisfaction with healthcare and follow-up care was noted, with regular check-ups every six weeks offering reassurance. However, the lack of comprehensive information from healthcare providers regarding the connection between breast and uterus health and the side effects of treatment was a significant concern. Effective communication between patients and healthcare providers is crucial for improved outcomes and patient satisfaction (Niedzwiedz et al., 2019).

The decision not to join support groups, despite being offered the opportunity, highlights the varied preferences and needs of patients. While support groups can provide emotional and psychological benefits, individual choices play a significant role in determining engagement (Khanna, 2021).

In terms of advocacy and awareness, the transition to promoting breast cancer awareness and educating other women underscores the importance of early detection and self-care. Advocacy efforts can significantly enhance public knowledge and encourage timely medical intervention (Smith et al., 2020).

Overall, the journey through cancer treatment and recovery is marked by resilience and the need for strong support systems, both medically and socially. The emotional, physical, and social dimensions of cancer survivorship require holistic approaches to ensure comprehensive care and improved quality of life.

4 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the long-term quality of life and survivorship issues faced by Pakistani women who have undergone treatment for cervical cancer. The case study methodology was chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena within their real-life context.

Participants

The study participants comprised a Pakistani Women who was cervical cancer survivor, aged 46 years. The participant was selected using purposive sampling to ensure a proper representation of socioeconomic background, educational level, experiences, and stages of survivorship.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interview conducted face-to-face in accordance with the preference and availability of participant. Interview lasted between 120 to 130 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' physical, emotional, and social well-being, as well as her experiences with healthcare services and support systems.

Data Analysis

A theme analysis was performed on the verbatim transcription of the interview recording. In order to find recurring themes and trends about the participant's social, emotional, and physical difficulties, the data had to be coded. The analysis was iterative, with initial codes being refined and grouped into broader themes as more data was analyzed.

Ethical Considerations

Approval of this study was granted by the appropriate institutional review board. Participant was provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and her rights as participant. Informed consent was obtained from participant, ensuring she understood her participation was voluntary and that she could withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the interview transcripts and securely storing all data.

5 CONCLUSION

The multifaceted journey of cancer diagnosis and treatment sheds light on the profound emotional, physical, and social challenges faced by survivors. The importance of timely medical intervention, effective communication with healthcare providers, and robust social support systems emerges as crucial elements in navigating these challenges. The resilience demonstrated in embracing physical changes, managing treatment side effects, and advocating for awareness underscores the significant role of personal strength and community support.

This journey illustrates the necessity for holistic approaches in cancer care that address not only the physical but also the emotional and psychological well-being of patients. Continued research and advocacy are essential to improving survivorship experiences and ensuring comprehensive care that supports patients' quality of life. The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the need for integrated care models that foster both medical and psychosocial support.

Human Ethics

Human ethics in the context of cancer research and patient care encompass several key principles to ensure the dignity, rights, and welfare of individuals involved. Informed consent is crucial, where patients must be fully informed about their condition, proposed treatments, potential risks and benefits, and alternatives, and they must voluntarily agree to the treatment or participation in research without coercion. Maintaining confidentiality is essential, ensuring that personal health information is kept private and only shared with authorized personnel. Healthcare professionals are required under the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence to behave in the best interests of their patients, making sure that the advantages of study or treatment outweigh the dangers and preventing harm.

Respect for people involves acknowledging patients' autonomy and providing care that aligns with their values and preferences. Justice ensures fairness in healthcare, providing equal access to care without discrimination based on race, gender, socio-economic status, or other factors. Ethical research practices are vital, involving informed consent, scientific validity, and risk minimization. Cultural sensitivity in care and communication enhances effectiveness by respecting patients' cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Advocacy by healthcare providers ensures patients receive necessary support and resources, empowering them to make informed decisions. Incorporating these principles into cancer care and research fosters trust and promotes the well-being of patients.

6 Recommendations

- First, healthcare providers must improve patient education and communication, ensuring patients understand all aspects of their treatment and potential side effects.

Strengthening emotional and psychological support by integrating mental health services into cancer care, such as counseling and support groups, is essential.

- Since there are more and more cancer survivors, clinical studies are being planned with long-term follow-up to evaluate not just survival but also late impacts and health-related quality of life (HRQOL). Therefore, it is crucial to create patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) that encompass all of the aspects that are pertinent to cancer survivors who are disease-free. Improving access to robust social support systems, including networks of family, friends, and community resources, can mitigate the isolation patients often feel.
- A holistic, patient-centered approach to care, addressing physical, emotional, and social needs, is crucial for better outcomes.
- Ensuring financial assistance and access to affordable healthcare services can alleviate the financial burden on patients. Promoting early detection and preventive measures through educational campaigns can enhance treatment success.
- Finally, advocacy for healthcare policy changes can ensure comprehensive support for cancer survivors. Implementing these recommendations can significantly improve their overall well-being.

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