

Cancer survival rates impact type of Web communities used by patients

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Online support communities for high survival rate cancers contain a greater amount of emotional support content than online support communities for cancers with low survival rates, according to a new study from the University of Michigan Health System and the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System.

The researchers also found that support communities for low survival rate cancers contain a greater amount of informational support content than online support communities for high survival rate cancers.

"Online communities have become an important resource for individuals seeking emotional and informational social support related to cancer," says senior author Caroline Richardson, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Michigan Health System.

The study—led by Lorraine Buis, Ph.D., a postdoctoral research fellow at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System—assessed differences in emotional and informational social support content in online communities for cancers with high and low survival rates.

The researchers also found that, overall, emotional support was more prevalent than informational support across all communities and all types of cancers.

Both emotional and informational support is widely available within

online communities for cancer, but not all of these sites are created equally, Buis notes.

"When primary care providers refer individuals to online communities for support, they should be aware that there might be differing amounts of support based on the survival rate of a particular cancer," she says. Buis also explains that not only are such online communities for patients, "but they help family and friends cope with the struggles that cancer presents."

Until Richardson's and Buis's most recent study, there had been no previous research on the influence of patients' cancer survival rates on social support content within online support communities for cancer.

Source: University of Michigan

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