

Latina women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer need more stress management tools

June 19 2015



Micrograph showing a lymph node invaded by ductal breast carcinoma, with extension of the tumor beyond the lymph node. Credit: Nephron/Wikipedia

Cancer is the most common cause of death among Latinos. It is estimated that one out of every three Latina women will be diagnosed with cancer during her lifetime. Given the increasing Latino population in the United States, more emphasis has to be placed on educating this population about cancer. Moffitt Cancer Center researchers, along with collaborators at the University of South Florida, recently published a study about the attitudes and cultural perspectives of Latinas undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. The article also discusses their cancer experiences and the ways they manage stress associated with cancer.

Moffitt researchers and collaborators interviewed 33 Latina breast [cancer patients](#) either during focus group sessions or in-depth interviews. The majority of the women were born outside of the United States and 45 percent of participants stated that Spanish was their only language. The team also interviewed 10 cancer care providers and advocates to assess their opinions about Latina cancer care and compare their responses to patient responses. Sixty percent of the health care providers/advocates self-identified as Hispanic and were bilingual.

The cancer patients and care providers had some of the same opinions about the key problems facing Latina cancer patients. They agreed that there is a lack of information for the Latina community about cancer and its treatment that can cause confusion and [stress](#) among patients when combined with communication barriers.

The researchers discovered several other issues that were important factors leading to stress for cancer patients that were not mentioned by their providers. Many described family-related issues as important stress-inducers during cancer treatment, including fear of not being able to provide and care for their families, not wanting to be a burden to their family and being far away from their native country and their families.

Despite these stress inducers, 64 percent of the cancer patients stated

that they had not received any type of stress management tools or information during their chemotherapy, though 95 percent of the patients believed that a [stress management](#) toolkit would have been helpful.

The researchers then asked the participants how they managed the stress associated with cancer. Latina patients and their providers stated that prayer, reading the bible and spirituality helped reduce stress. Spending time with family and trying to maintain a normal day-to-day routine was also given as a stress reducing option by both sets of participants. Techniques that were only mentioned by the cancer patients included exercise, reading educational material, listening to music, staying positive, watching TV and deep breathing exercises.

Researchers emphasized that educational material for Latina cancer patients should be developed in their native language and written by writers who are familiar with their culture. It is important to consider regional variations within Latino communities throughout the United States, be inclusive of Latina families and be cognizant of the attitudes, beliefs and obligations of Latinas to their families. Physicians and [care providers](#) must also be aware of the ongoing stresses associated with [cancer treatment](#) and the support systems that Latinas turn to in order to reduce stress.

More information: The study was published in the May 8 issue of the *Journal of Cancer Education* : link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13187-015-0844-x

Provided by H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

Citation: Latina women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer need more stress

management tools (2015, June 19) retrieved 21 July 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-latina-women-chemotherapy-breast-cancer.html>

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