

Cancer survivors find online and phone communication with medical professionals beneficial

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Advances in cancer care have led to a rise in the number of people surviving the illness. Cancer survival rates are now at an all-time high with 2.5 million cancers survivors in the United Kingdom, a number which is set to rise to 4 million by 2030.

To manage increasing demand on cancer services in the NHS, healthcare providers are encouraging people to play an active role in managing their care. The [telehealth](#) system is one way this can be achieved, using technology to provide remote personalised health care to patients which allows the exchange of data and communication between patients and healthcare professionals. Telehealth services allow patients to have meetings and follow up consultations either on the phone or through online services at a time that suits them.

Having examined studies which reported [cancer patients'](#) direct views on their experience of telehealth, the researchers led by Dr Anna Cox found that the majority of cancer survivors found the use of telehealth to be a positive and worthwhile experience.

Cancer survivors who had used telehealth reported their appreciation of the flexibility and convenience of the programme which enabled them to engage with [healthcare providers](#) with minimum disruption to their lives and in a comfortable, familiar environment.

The research also found that the invisibility and perceived anonymity that telehealth provided reduced cancer survivors' sense of vulnerability and in some cases enabled them to raise concerns remotely that they would not have wanted to discuss face-to-face.

There were some aspects of telehealth that cancer survivors liked less. For example, some survivors viewed telehealth as an impersonal service which did not allow them to meet their healthcare team in person. Other survivors were unable to engage with the service due to particular personal circumstances such as hearing issues (in a telephone-based intervention), or lack of computer literacy skills (in computer-based studies).

Dr Anna Cox, from the School of Health Sciences said: "On World Cancer Day it is important that we raise awareness of this serious illness and consider the impact of alternative models of care on cancer survivors.

"Our research found that cancer survivors wanted to get back to their daily lives as quickly as possible, telehealth helped facilitate this as it removed the often burdensome visits to hospital and enabled the integration of care into daily routines.

"For many cancer survivors, telehealth supported their independence and offered them reassurance. However it is all down to personal preference, as some cancer survivors still preferred traditional methods of care.

"We are now living in a digital world and it is important that our care models take advantage of this in order to meet increased demands on the National Health Service. Involving a range of [cancer survivors](#) in the design of telehealth interventions is essential to their success."

More information: Anna Cox et al, Cancer Survivors' Experience

With Telehealth: A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.2196/jmir.6575](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6575)

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