

New study examines breast cancer survivors' experiences managing cancer and work

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A new study by University of Kentucky researchers examines breast cancer survivors' experiences with communicating with their oncology team about employment and work issues.

Published in the *Journal of Cancer Education*, the study leaders conducted 24 qualitative interviews with Kentucky [breast cancer](#) survivors who were working 30 hours per week or more at the time of diagnosis. All were earning less than \$15 per hour and were between the ages of 18-65. More than 70 percent of respondents reported no [communication](#) or only routine communication with their providers regarding work and employment issues, while 75 percent reported poor or standard communication quality on the topic.

Research suggests that more than 80 percent of women return to work between 12 and 18 months following a breast [cancer diagnosis](#). However, returning to work includes challenges including financial stress, changes in [work hours](#) or roles, coping with physical and/or cognitive limitations, and risk of future unemployment. In [low-wage](#) earning workers, these challenges can be magnified due to fewer benefits and less flexibility associated with low-wage jobs; additionally, women who hold low-wage jobs are less likely to take recommended time off following a cancer diagnosis and are more likely to work throughout treatment.

Improving patient-provider communication on this topic may help low-wage earning breast cancer survivors better co-manage treatment and work responsibilities, says Robin Vanderpool, chief of the Health Communication and Informatics Research Branch at the National Cancer Institute, who helped lead the study while a professor in the UK College of Public Health.

"There is a need for education of oncology team members about how cancer and its treatment can impact employment for all workers, but especially for low-wage workers, which would help the care team address these issues proactively," Vanderpool said. "It also allows providers to advocate for patients who may be employed in precarious work environments through the provision of documentation that may

assist with securing workplace accommodations, flexible work schedules, and reassigned duties."

More information: Helen M. Nichols et al. Patient-Provider Communication: Experiences of Low-Wage-Earning Breast Cancer Survivors in Managing Cancer and Work, *Journal of Cancer Education* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s13187-018-1338-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-018-1338-4)

Provided by University of Kentucky

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