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Teaching patients about chemotherapy using graphic medicine

Objectives: To evaluate the efficacy of a graphic medicine narrative about chemotherapy as a tool to improve educational and emotional well-being among gynecologic oncology patients.

Methods: This study uses a multistage mixed-methods design to develop and evaluate a graphic medicine resource addressing the chemotherapy experience. Support groups composed of patients, physicians, nurses, care coordinator representatives, and cancer survivors provided input, and their feedback was incorporated into a culturally tailored, easy-to-read pamphlet in English and subsequently translated into Spanish and Vietnamese. The ease of use was evaluated using Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and Flesch Reading Ease assessments. A post-intervention survey was then administered to assess patient demographics, reliability, helpfulness, and emotional response to the pamphlet. Because this study is ongoing, the chi-square goodness-of-fit test will be used to evaluate response distribution upon completion of survey collection.

Results: 156 surveys have been collected: 134 English-speaking patients; 17 Spanish-speaking; and 5 Vietnamese-speaking. The greatest number of participants identified as Black (42.7%), followed by white (39.6%), Latino/Hispanic (15.2%), Asian (4.3%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.2%). The most common cancer type was endometrial cancer (39.3%), followed by ovarian/fallopian tube (32.5%) and cervical (14.7%). Most participants agreed that reading the comic helped prepare them for chemotherapy (93.4%), they were more aware of potential side effects (94.7%), learned more about vetted online resources (96%), learned something new (86.6%), learned something useful (94.7%), and were more prepared to deal with potential hair loss (82.1%). Patients felt a sense of direction and empowerment in dealing with their cancer after reading the pamphlet (90%) and were able to relate to our main character (97.3%). Patients reported feeling less anxious about receiving chemotherapy (75.5%) and felt less alone in their cancer journey (81.6%). The enjoyment rate was overwhelming at 98.7%.

Conclusions: This study was a well-received, highly successful resource addressing chemotherapy in a diverse gynecologic oncology population. A majority of participants reported increased and/or improved knowledge, greater feelings of empowerment, and reduced anxiety after reading the pamphlet. These findings support graphic medicine as an encouraging, patient-centered tool for chemotherapy counseling in gynecologic oncology and should be considered in additional fields and disciplines.