



IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN STATEN ISLAND FOR YOUNG ADULT ONCOLOGY PATIENTS

Gianna Persico, Daniele Polatnick, Katherine Arnold
Wagner College, Evelyn L. Spiro School of Nursing

INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a prevalent disease, especially in the borough of Staten Island, (1) which has been affecting the population of younger adults ages 18-29 more prevalently. While many treatments focus on curing the disease itself, there are many side effects that coincide with the toxic treatments including mental health consequences on patients. Staten Island needs to desperately improve their resources for young adult oncology patients who are suffering from the psychological effects of cancer treatment such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder in order to better the quality of life and survivorship.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

According to the United States Census Bureau, as of 2018, the estimated population of Staten Island was 476,179. The median household income in Staten Island is \$76,244. When stratified by race, African Americans and Latinx are more likely to live in poverty than other demographic groups in Staten Island. According to the Department of Health in New York, the rate of all cancers combined on Staten Island was 16% higher than that for NYC and 3% higher than that for NYS excluding NYC. (2) Although there are proportionately more incidents of cancer diagnosed in Staten Island than NYC, the rate of death to cancer is similar in Staten Island as NYC and lower than the national rate. This finding suggests that in Staten Island, cancers are being identified and effectively treated. Economically, people in Staten Island are more likely to have health insurance and a regular doctor. A key informant study was conducted; according to the findings, mental health services were chosen as a missing resource by 53% of informants.

PROBLEM IN THE COMMUNITY

Staten Island significantly lacks resources for patients going through cancer treatment, especially going through mental health distress. Young adults are trying to figure out their path in life. The pressure of being a young adult, crippled with a cancer diagnosis can be very overwhelming. It is no shock that it would cause depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder in this population.

- The CDC states "As many as three out of every four cancer survivors experience symptoms of psychological distress or cognitive concerns, which can negatively affect their overall well-being and health outcomes. Distress screening is recommended for cancer patients in all clinical settings... Unfortunately, one-third or fewer cancer survivors have talked to their doctor about their psychosocial needs and concerns, and fewer survivors receive treatment for distress" (4).
- On Staten Island, there are nearly no support groups for cancer patients. Local Staten Island newspaper suggests the borough's only source of care for oncology patients to seek information through the American Cancer Society. Patients are offered services once a month through appointment only. The Ad in SLIVE states the following information "The American Cancer Society is a nationwide community-based voluntary health organization... Monthly support groups for cancer patients and their caregivers are offered." (5). Although this organization is available to discuss treatment options for patients, there is no direct mental health services and especially no emergency distress service for patients in need. Patients going through cancer treatment need resources to help them cope with grieving of hair loss, side effects, anxiety and other psychological issues. Research studies have demonstrated the "strong link between feeling confident in appearance and self-esteem - never more evident than when facing the rigors of cancer treatment" (6).

PROPOSED SOLUTION

The Cancer Distress Scales-Adolescent and Young Adults (CDS-AYA) is a screening tool that will be used to detect deteriorating mental health in adolescent cancer patients. This is a new patient-reported outcomes measure that comprises five independently functioning scales including the following: Impact of Cancer (12 items), Physical (12 items), Emotional (11 items), Cognitive (8 items), and Cancer Worry (5 items) (5). After the results are processed and it is determined that the patient needs psychological help they will be referred to a new innovative health program on Staten Island. This program will treat the psychological needs of young oncologic patients. The programs provided at this center will be physical activities, physical therapy, regular therapy, occupational therapy and yoga. If the patient is severely immunosuppressed and advised by the patient care provider not to physically interact with others then they will be referred to an online therapy program. This program is through CancerCare, they provide emotional support to people with cancer through the internet or phone. In order to have these programs we must reach out to government and local leaders in order to achieve a government grant. With government funding and donations from cancer societies a program will be able to serve this population.

REFERENCES

1. U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Richmond County (Staten Island Borough), New York [Internet]. Census Bureau QuickFacts.
2. [Internet]. Health.ny.gov. 2020 [cited 10 March 2020]. Available from https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/cancer/docs/richmond_final_report
3. Caring for Cancer Survivors [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020 [cited 10 March 2020]. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/health-care-providers/mental-health-care-prov-ad.htm>
4. Rae CS, Rae CS, Tsengaris E, Klassen AF, Breskey V, D'Agnostino N, et al. Comparison of Patient-Reported Outcome Measures for Use as Performance Metrics in Adolescent and Young Adult Psychosocial Cancer Care [Internet]. Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., publishers. 2019. Available from <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/jpsp.2019.0093>
5. Staten Island health services: Support groups and organizations available to assist patients [Internet]. slive. 2015 [cited 10 March 2020]. Available from
6. Sharma G, Prakash K, & Narayan P. J. (2018). Effectiveness of Teaching Regarding Individualized Coping Strategy on Self-Esteem of Cancer Patients Undergoing Radiation

