Impact of Oncology Aesthetic Consult Service on Patient/Survivor Body Image and Relationships: A qualitative pilot study

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Abstract

The use of cosmetic interventions to improve body image is implemented in many cancer centers through the American Cancer Society’s Look Good, Feel Better program. Qualitative research is beginning to reflect on this important aspect of improvements to body image (Huang and Liu, 2006; Quindell and Lilja, 2008). UT Southwestern Cancer Center aims to further make an effort in the provision of oncology aesthetic treatments. The center expanded its interventions with cosmetic, skin care, and hair care consultations and treatments to provide the standard group psychoeducational experience as well as individualized and ongoing services that can follow a patient from diagnosis through survivorship care. The program is a partnership of an interdisciplinary team including the nursing staff, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and radiation therapists.

Methods

Twelve female Simmons Cancer Center patients who had a consult with the aesthetics in the past 12 months were asked to participate and 10 consented. Six patients were vaccinated by phone and four were interviewed in person in the cancer center. Participants were asked five questions and all responses were transcribed and coded to look for validity and accuracy. Response were analyzed by two of the authors.

Results

Figure 2. Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>Responses indicated that 50% of participants access aesthetic services through staff referral, 69% were self-referred, 10% did not remember. The in-person experience was described by 100% of participants as reassuring due to the availability and approachability of the aesthetician.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>The in-person experience was described by 100% of participants as reassuring due to the availability and approachability of the aesthetician.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>50% of patients indicated the value of ongoing access to the aesthetician following their initial visit. Two participants (2%) reported increased confidence and self-esteem since the consultation.</td>
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<td>Question 4</td>
<td>All respondents (100%) reported the ability to independently reproduce techniques learned during the aesthetic consultation.</td>
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<td>Question 5</td>
<td>All respondents (100%) reported that their needs were met through their consultation with the Oncology Aesthetician. One respondent (10%) expressed a desire to have known about the Oncology Aesthetic Services earlier.</td>
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Conclusion

This small sample suggests an oncology aesthetician consult can increase a sense of redefinition, self-confidence, and self-esteem: these results support prior studies demonstrating that body image issues are common among oncology aesthetic patients (Huang and Liu, 2006; Quindell and Lilja, 2008). The data suggests patients want ongoing aesthetic care to be accessible to them and their doctors. Will they be able to implement the techniques learned during your appointment with the Oncology Aesthetician? To date, no data exist on whether patients would have liked to have done this when first meeting with the oncology aesthetician. This is perceived to be important by the patient. What services are offered in your oncology aesthetician consult? This is also supported by empirical studies showing the impact of cancer treatment on body image (Fingerle et al., 2001; Fingerle and Epper, 2014). This project was limited by direct practice responsibilities versus dedicated research time. Limitations also included a small sample size and the referral process should be reviewed with typical patients towards breast and gynecological cancers.

Future Research

The goal of offering the whole person to be included in reducing suffering, to support treatment and body image, and improve well-being (Hines & Leland, 2007). Increasingly empirical investigation focuses on body image as a component of quality of life. This issue increases since many of our cancer patients experience long-term effects (Abrams et al., 2007; McKeel, Devins, and Goodwin, 1998). Further research to explore the importance of access to the aesthetician throughout all stages of care, with an emphasis on survivorship, would support the direction of cancer care within the medical field. Additional quantitative and qualitative research is needed to explore the effects of aesthetic intervention on body image and quality of life. More specifically, dimensions of social interaction, familial relationships, and work place, confidence may be areas of interest.

References


The effect of cosmetic interventions to improve body image is implemented in many cancer centers through the American Cancer Society’s Look Good, Feel Better program.