Anxiety and Depression among Cancer Survivors: The Role of Engagement with Sources of Emotional Support Information

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Abstract:

This study explores cancer survivors' engagement with information about emotional support from doctors, interpersonal sources, and the media and examines to what extent such engagement affects subsequent self-reported anxiety and depression. Patients with colorectal, breast, or prostate cancer (n=1,128) were surveyed over three years following diagnosis. Using lagged logistic regression, we predicted the odds of experiencing anxiety or depression based on earlier engagement with sources of emotional support, adjusting for past psychological symptoms and confounders. Among those reporting anxiety and depression (n=476), we also asked whether information engagement affected the severity of these symptoms. Participants obtained information about emotional support from multiple sources, but most often from physicians. Discussions with physicians about emotional support increased the odds of cancer survivors subsequently reporting anxiety or depression by 1.58 times (95% CI: 1.06 to 2.35; p=0.025), adjusted for prior symptoms and confounders. Scanning from media sources was also significantly associated with increased odds of reporting emotional symptoms (OR=1.72; 95% CI: 1.03 to 2.87; p=0.039). However, among those who reported symptoms, doctor-patient engagement predicted less interference of these symptoms with daily activities (B=-0.198; 95% CI: -0.393 to -0.003; p=0.047). Although talking to physicians about emotional support predicts self-reported anxiety and depression, it may assist survivors in coping with these symptoms at earlier phases and minimize their impact on daily life. Important implications for health communication research and practice are discussed.