THE INFORMATIONAL NEEDS OF WOMEN WITH CERVICAL CANCER

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ABSTRACT

Women diagnosed with cervical cancer are confronted with enormous physical and emotional distress. Information plays a significant role in these women's coping process, enabling them to understand their situation, make adjustment in life and erase their feelings of isolation, and stigmatization. So far, little research has been done in New Zealand to study the information need profile of women with cervical cancer, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the information. The present study offers insight into cervical cancer patients' informational needs, their level of satisfaction with information, and the current ways of information delivery in the region.

Twenty cervical cancer patients from the greater Auckland region and eleven health professionals were recruited for this evaluative study. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from both patients' and health professionals' perspectives. Results show areas of high informational needs among the participants, and suggest that emphasis should be placed on providing sufficient information in the areas with deficits, such as the causes of cancer, life expectancy, changes in sexual function, how other people live with the disease, and where to get information when needed. Evaluating the participants' use of informational sources reveals that they obtained information from a variety of sources. Some information services, such as patient counseling and support services, the Cancer Society and the oncology district nursing services were helpful but under-utilized by the patients.

Overall, the study shows that most patient participants were satisfied with the information provided by health services in the region. However, the existence of gaps between information needs and satisfaction in certain areas, and the reports of multiple barriers in patients' access to information, indicate that the informational needs of women with cervical cancer had not been adequately met. The findings stress the importance of individual assessment, care coordination and close collaboration among service providers. To provide patients with easily accessible, clearly defined, and readily available information was a recurrent theme in the participants' recommendations to information services in the region.

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