


**The Role of Patient Support Networks  
in Cancer Outcomes**

**Justin M. Yopp, PhD**

Clinical Psychologist, Comprehensive Cancer  
Support Program  
Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

1

**Disclosure**

*The Group: Seven Widowed Fathers  
Reimagine Life*

(Oxford University Press)



---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

2

**Outline**

- I. Describe the two types of social support networks
- II. Present key findings from social support network research
- III. Share impact of support from diagnosis, treatment, survivorship
- IV. Discuss fostering social support networks for cancer patients, caregivers, bereaved



---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

3

**Social Support Networks**

Why are these important?

General state of research;  
what is offered to patients

4

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

**Social Support Networks**

- Research studies have found that better social support is related to:
  - Lower psychosocial distress
  - Better treatment adherence
  - Better grasp of illness- & treatment-related info
  - Facilitate resilience
  - Engendering sense of empowerment
  - Coping with death and dying

5

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

**Social Support Networks**

- There are different theories of how social support leads to better outcomes.
- Wortman’s theory of interpersonal relationships
  - Support helps patients cope with uncertainty brought about by cancer diagnosis; support = less uncertainty and reduces compounded distress

6

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

### Two Broad Categories

1. Embedded support networks
  - Family, spouses, friends, neighbors
  - Networks that are established at time of diagnosis
2. Peer support networks
  - One-on-one peer support
  - Peer group support



7

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

### Embedded Support

- Robust embedded social support networks are related to patient's psychosocial adaptation and reducing distress
- Correlation between presence of a dedicated partner/advocate and survival rates
- Providers should encourage/amplify patients' use of embedded networks



8

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

### Peer Support

- Peer support may come in different forms. The most common being one-to-one peer support programs.
- Often involves a cancer survivor offering instrumental and emotional support soon after diagnosis and through treatment.
- Peers may be uniquely situated to provide support that resonates with the patient.



9

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

### Peer Support

- Peer support programs are generally preferred by health care systems because of their perceived benefits and relatively low cost to maintain.
- Several meta-analyses have examined benefits of one-to-one peer support studies.
- Results are generally encouraging, if not overwhelmingly positive.



---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

10

### Specific Population Considerations

- Social support networks for the following populations:
  - Patients w/ breast or prostate cancer (most commonly studied)
  - African-Americans
  - Adolescents & young adults
  - Parents of children with cancer
  - Caregivers
  - Bereaved family members



---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

11

### Peer support at N.C. Cancer Hospital

- Peer navigation
- Caregiver Conversations
  - Weekly meetings
- Support groups
- Widowed Parent peer support groups



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

12



13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



15

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

What next?

Peer support at your location

16

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

References

- Andrykowski, M., Lykins, E., & Floyd, A. (2008). Psychological health in cancer survivors. *Seminars in Oncology Nursing*, 24, 193-201.
- Capistrant, B, Leshner, L. et al. (2018). Social support and health-related quality of life among gay and bisexual men with prostate cancer. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 45, 439-455.
- Cohen, S. & Wills, T. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98, 310-357.
- Gage-Bouchard, E., LaValley, S., Panagakis, C., & Shelton, R. (2015). The architecture of support: The activation of preexisting ties and formation of new ties for tailored support. *Social Science & Medicine*, 134, 59-65.
- Giese-Davis, J. et al (2006). The effect of peer counseling on quality of life following diagnosis of breast cancer: an observational study. *Psycho-Oncology*, 15, 1014-1022.
- Hauken, M. & Larsen, T. (2019). Young adult cancer patients' experiences of private social network support during cancer treatment. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 28.
- Hauken, M., Pereira, M., & Senneseth, M. (2018). The effects of children's anxiety and quality of life of a psychoeducational program for families living with parental cancer and their network. *Cancer Nursing*, 41, 473-483.

17

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

References

- Hoey, L., Ieropoli, S., White, V., & Jefford, M. (2008). Systematic review of peer-support programs for people with cancer. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 70, 1783-1788.
- Kamen, C, Mustain, K et al. (2015). The association between partner support and psychological distress among prostate cancer survivors in a nationwide study. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*, 9, 492-499.
- Lee, M. & Suh, S-R. (2018). Effects of peer-led interventions for patients with cancer: A Meta-Analysis. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 45, 1-20.
- Lorig, K. & Holman, H. (2003). Self-management education: History, definition, outcomes, and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 26, 1-7.
- Macvean, M., White, W., & Sanson-Fisher, R. (2008). One-to-one volunteer support programs for people with cancer: A review of the literature. *Patient Education & Counseling*, 70, 10-24.
- Meyer, A, Coroiu, A., Komer, A. (2014). One-to-one peer support in cancer care: A review of scholarship published between 2007 and 2014. *European Journal of Cancer Care*, 24, 299-312.
- Wortman C. & Dunkel-Schetter, C. (1979). Interpersonal relationships and cancer: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35, 120-155.

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---