Breaking News of Cancer Diagnosis: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences and Emotional Needs of Patients With Cancer in a Multiethnic Asian Setting

Li-Ping Wong, Yek-Ching Kong, Nanthini Thevi Bhoo-Pathy, Shridevi Subramaniam, Ros Suzanna Bustamam, Nur Aishah Taib, Gwo-Fuang Ho, Hafizah Zaharah, Matin Mellor, Yin-Ling Woo, Cheng-Har Yip, Nirmala Bhoo-Pathy

Affiliations
PMID: 32986532 DOI: 10.1200/JOP.20.00002

Abstract

**Purpose:** The breaking of news of a cancer diagnosis is an important milestone in a patient’s cancer journey. We explored the emotional experiences of patients with cancer during the breaking of news of a cancer diagnosis and the arising needs in a multiethnic Asian setting with limited supportive cancer care services.

**Methods:** Twenty focus group discussions were conducted with 102 Asian patients with cancer from diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. Thematic analysis was performed.

**Results:** While most participants, especially younger patients with young children, experienced intense emotional distress upon receiving a cancer diagnosis, those with a family history of cancer were relatively calm and resigned. Nonetheless, the prior negative experience with cancer in the family made affected participants with a family history less eager to seek cancer treatment and less hopeful for a cure. Although a majority viewed the presence of family members during the breaking of bad news as important, a minority opted to face it alone to lessen the emotional impact on their family members. Difficulties disclosing the news of a cancer diagnosis to loved ones also emerged as an important need. Sensitive and empathetic patient-physician communication during the breaking of news of a cancer diagnosis was stressed as paramount.

**Conclusion:** A patient-centered communication approach needs to be developed to reduce the emotional distress to patients and their families after the breaking of bad news of a cancer diagnosis. This is expected to positively affect the patients’ subsequent coping skills and attitudes toward cancer, which may improve adherence to cancer therapy.

Related information

MedGen