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BACKGROUND

- Approximately 240,000 Canadians were diagnosed with cancer in 2023.¹
- Nearly 2 in 5 Canadians will develop cancer in their lifetime.¹
- Most people with cancer are exposed to toxic therapies and face life-long challenges related to long-term effects of cancer treatment.
- COVID-19, also called coronavirus disease 2019, started spreading at the end of 2019 and became a pandemic disease in 2020.
- Exploring the experiences of people with cancer during COVID-19, particularly in relation to their use of protective health behaviors such as handwashing and physical distancing, can provide important data to inform behavioural research in this area.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What were the experiences of people living with cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How did people with cancer perceive and engage with protective health behaviors?

METHODS

- Qualitative design
- 45-60 minute one-on-one interviews (over Zoom or phone)
- Interpretive, inductive analytical approach
- Eligibility: Adults living with cancer during COVID-19

THREE THEMES EMERGED FROM THE DATA

1. A NUANCED DEFINITION OF THREAT

- To personal health/safety
- To health/safety of family members and loved ones
- Threat to society/individual rights

"I didn't go in to get treatment because I was afraid of getting infected in the hospital"
"There was a culture shock going into the city, being around so many people"
"I had to sign a waiver to get the shot.... I didn't get it.... I didn't mask up unless others were concerned"

2. BARRIERS TO CARE IN HEALTH SYSTEM

- Cancelled appointments/telehealth appointments
- Dehumanized/treated as a number

"Going into the cancer center... I basically felt like a drive-thru number"

3. ISOLATION AND LACK OF SUPPORT

- More social isolation due to risk of infection
- Lost relationships with family and friends due to COVID-19

"There were no resources, no handouts, we had to get in and get out as quickly as possible"
"If I wanted treatment, I had to be isolated by myself, in a different house than my husband."

PARTICIPANTS

- ✓ N= 17 participants with current cancer diagnosis from across Saskatchewan
- ✓ Average age: 54.6 years
- ✓ Sex: Female (n=13), Male (n=4)
- ✓ Cancer: Breast (n=10), Prostate (n=2), Lymphoma (n=2), Multiple myeloma (n=1), Leukemia (n=1), Skin (n=1)

IMPLICATIONS



Psychological

Highlighting the need for mental health resources and support
 Addressing mental health: the "forgotten symptom"



Social

Providing enhanced social support to people with cancer



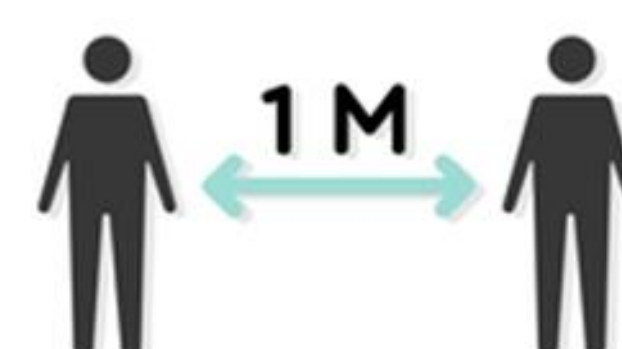
Systemic

Improving training for healthcare providers
 Updating policies to address shortcomings in oncology care during COVID-19

PREVENTION

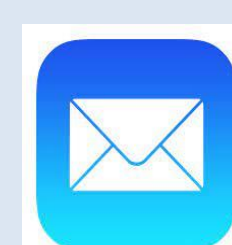


CORONAVIRUS 2019 nCoV



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References:

1. Canadian Cancer Society. Cancer statistics at a glance. <https://cancer.ca/en/>. Accessed April 2024.