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Alison Alpert
Wai Lun Au
David Larsen
Jenna Pariseau
Vanessa Patten

See next page for additional authors

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Assessing Wellness Needs of Breast Cancer Survivors in Vermont

Alpert A1, Au WL1, Larsen D1, Pariseau J1, Patten V1, Robison E1, Vana G1, Dyer L2, Carney J1

1University of Vermont College of Medicine 2 Dragonheart Vermont

Background

• In Vermont, 500 breast cancer diagnoses are made annually1,2.
• As of 2005, epidemiological data suggest that as many as 7,000 breast cancer survivors were living in VT3.
• Dragonheart Vermont’s “Survivorship NOW”4 initiative aims to bridge the gap between treatment and recovery.
• A literature review, including the Taking Charge5 initiative, supported conducting a needs assessment in three areas: exercise, nutrition, and emotional support.
• UVM COM paired with Dragonheart Vermont’s “Survivorship NOW”6 initiative to determine how best to address these needs.

Methods

• An anonymous two-page (16 item) survey assessed survivors’ needs and community involvement.
• 127 surveys were obtained from breast cancer survivors out of the 208 identified cancer survivors attending the 4th Annual Vermont Cancer Center Breast Cancer Conference, October 2011 (7 respondents’ data excluded).
• Dragonheart miniature batik dragons were provided for survey completion.
• Responses to open-ended items were re-coded into one of 8 categories.
• Likert-like scales (very unlikely, unlikely, likely, very likely OR strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) were used for items targeting support program settings; responses were collapsed into 2 categories for the purpose of statistical analysis.
• 2 x 2 X2 tests (alpha = .05, 1 tailed) were used to assess associations between participants’ interest in nutrition/other programs and the settings of those programs.

Results

What Has Helped Survivors?
(n=108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Has Helped Survivors?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support (n=91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills (n=48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Improvement (n=28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart &amp; Brain Health (n=17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropy (n=16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninterested (n=9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75%
35%
28%
28%
14%
19%

What Do Survivors Need?
(n=92)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Do Survivors Need?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Improvement (n=45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (n=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care (n=18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Resources (n=11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service (n=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninterested (n=7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52%
36%
18%
11%
9%
7%

What Programs Do Survivors Want?
(count, %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Programs Do Survivors Most Want?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise Program (n=40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional Program (n=37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Program (n=22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Involvement Opportunities (n=10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38, 38%
26, 24%
18, 17%
14, 14%
12, 12%
5, 5%
5, 5%

What Kind of Support Are Survivors Likely to Use?
(n=125 interested in a support program)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Kind of Support Are Survivors Likely to Use?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddy Support (n=106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Consults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52%
26%
18%
14%
12%

Discussion

• Respondents most frequently indicated that health improvement resources for nutrition and exercise would help them have a better quality of life.
• In these data, breast cancer survivors appear more likely to participate in an exercise program (relative to nutrition and other programs).
• Dragonheart Vermont’s “Survivorship NOW” programming might benefit from a strong emphasis on exercise.
• 25% of respondents wanted to change their diet, indicating the importance of a nutrition component.
• According to respondents, a nutritional information source such as a newsletter would be well-received.
• Respondents cited the importance of support from family, friends and health care providers.
• Support is an ongoing need, especially in the transition from treatment to survivorship.
• Survivor matching (buddy system) could be used.
• Limitations to this study include: small population, survey respondent interpretation, bias imposed by conference themes.

Recommendations for “Survivorship NOW”:
• Monthly newsletter/website with healthy cooking tips and consolidated nutrition information.
• “Satellite” exercise groups in communities outside of Chittenden County.
• A buddy-matching program for survivors – could be community-based.
• Giving back to the community via quilting, volunteer work, etc.

Conclusion

References:
1University of Vermont College of Medicine 2 Dragonheart Vermont
4Dragonheart Vermont’s “Survivorship NOW” initiative
7Survey respondents’ data excluded.
8Limitations to this study include: small population, survey respondent interpretation, bias imposed by conference themes.