

Mental health care service experiences and needs in cancer survivors

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Biography:

Dr Gulliver is a research fellow at the Centre for Mental Health Research, The Australian National University. Her research focuses on finding practical solutions to improve mental health in at-risk population groups. Dr Gulliver's primary research interests include lived experience, e-mental health and suicide prevention, and help-seeking in young adults.

There are more than a million cancer survivors living in Australia.¹ Mental health issues are ongoing for cancer survivors² and may require long-term management in health services. However, rigorous investigation of the mental health care experiences and needs of cancer survivors is severely lacking. The current study seeks to fill this gap. A total of 131 cancer survivors (91.8% female, 9.2% male) completed a cross-sectional online survey, advertised on social media via paid advertising and cancer support groups. Almost 80% of participants were aged over 56 years. The most common cancer experienced was breast cancer (45.0%), followed by blood cancers (11.5%), and bowel cancer (9.9%). Only one-third of respondents recalled being offered mental health care at diagnosis. Qualitative analyses indicated that among those who described their experiences accessing mental health care (n=24), half described positive experiences, with the other half describing negative experiences; however, almost all of the negative experiences were about having difficulties accessing the care, not the care itself. When describing their needs for mental health care services, most identified services factors such as early access, improved accessibility, low or no cost services, shorter wait times, and having mental health care integrated into their overall health care plan.

Learning Objectives

Delegates will be provided with an opportunity to learn about the mental health service care experiences and service needs of a sample of Australian cancer survivors in study led by a lived-experience researcher.

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). Cancer data in Australia. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/cancer-data-in-australia>
2. Gotze, H., Taubenheim, S., Dietz, A., Lordick, F., Mehnert, A. (2018). Comorbid conditions and health-related quality of life in long-term cancer survivors-Associations with demographic and medical characteristics. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*, 12(5).