Psychosocial Variables Affecting Breast Cancer Patient Quality of Life

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The role of psychosocial care for cancer patients has become a priority to include in effective cancer treatment. Estimates indicate that 88% of women with breast cancer recover from the disease, precipitating the need for long term psychological assistance to ensure high quality of life (QOL) for these cancer survivors. One key contributor to breast cancer patient QOL is social support. This study aimed to determine the levels of social support that minority patients receive from their friends and family and from their care team, specifically the support provided in the realm of chemobrain, or the mild deterioration of cognitive function secondary to chemotherapy treatment. Participants included a diverse population (27.9% Hispanic, 55.8% African American, 16.3% Caucasian/Asian) of 55 female breast cancer patients, and eight medical providers. Participants completed surveys that measured levels of perceived social support, QOL, patients' awareness of chemobrain, and medical professionals support provided for chemobrain. Minority breast cancer patients reported significantly higher levels of social support from their friends and family than their majority counterparts ($p<.05$), and the relationship between social support and QOL reported a trend ($r=.269$; $p=.065$). However, only 15.4% of the patients had heard of the term chemobrain, while 7.7% reported having had a conversation about chemobrain with their physician or nurse. Medical personnel in the study were familiar with chemobrain, but did little to inform patients about the condition because of their attitudes toward its credibility. These findings can assist the identification and advance the understanding of crucial psychosocial markers that can predict and help improve the QOL of minority breast cancer patients.

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