

Paper Session E2: Individuals with Cancer: Current Experiences & Emerging Themes

The Experiences of Unpartnered Men with Prostate Cancer: A Qualitative Analysis

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine how men without partners make decisions about prostate cancer treatment, manage treatment side effects, and obtain information and support.

Background: In 2009, it was projected that over 230,000 men were diagnosed with prostate cancer. While treatment options vary, these options result in changes within the man that can affect his quality of life. Research has shown that often spouses play a central role in men's choice of treatment and in maintaining men's quality of life. In addition, spouses are the major providers of emotional support and physical care. However, little is known about how men without partners cope with prostate cancer. Prior research seldom addresses how diagnosis and treatment for prostate cancer affects the quality of life of men without partners.

Methods: Because very little is known about the needs of men without partners managing prostate cancer, qualitative analysis of data obtained during semi-structure interviews provided respondents with an opportunity to share the lived experience of prostate cancer. A semi-structure interview was conducted with selected, consenting men. The sample was drawn from the ongoing R01 study of men with prostate cancer (PROSTQA).

Results: The target sample was 20 men without partners drawn from the ongoing study of men with prostate cancer. Data analysis began after the 17th patient completed the interview and revealed data saturation had been reached. Ages of the sample participants ranged from 47 to 72 with a mean age of 63. The participants had between zero and two co-morbidities with an average of one co-morbidity per participant. The sample was 82% Caucasian and 17% Black. A total of 35% of the participants reported "some college" (n = 6) 30% graduated from college (n = 5), and 23% went to graduate school (n = 4). One participant reported that he was a high school graduate and one had less than a high school education. Five themes emerged from the data: going it alone, diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment decision-making, sources of information and support, the aftermath of prostate cancer, and coping strategies.

Conclusions: This study provides information about unpartnered men's prostate cancer experience. This information will help health care professionals to meet the needs of unpartnered more effectively and help them to assist men as they adapt to living with this chronic illness.