

Abstract

The present study examined the social support resources available for young adult LGBTQ cancer survivors in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. A search was conducted for both cancer-related support and general social support. Search results revealed 21 sources of support for young LGBTQ within Edmonton and Northern Alberta. Only 5 of the sources located were specifically related to cancer.

Introduction

Cancer is a serious health issue within the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ individuals have an increased risk for particular kinds of cancer and tend to have poorer outcomes associated with cancer (Matthews et al, 2016). These disparities are associated with behavioral risk factors that are intricately linked to the stress and stigmatization faced by members of this community (National LGBTQ Cancer Network, 2016). LGBTQ individuals may also avoid the health care system out of a fear of discrimination, creating a barrier to health care including early cancer screening and detection services.

Needs of LGBTQ Survivors.

The socially isolating effects of cancer can be heightened for young LGBTQ survivors who may already experience alienation from family and peers. LGBTQ survivors experience higher levels of psychological distress than their heterosexual counterparts including more symptoms of depression and relationship difficulties (Kamen et al. 2015). Low levels of social and emotional support, experiences of discrimination in health care, and poor patient-provider relationships significantly impact the mental health quality of their life (Matthews et al. 2016). These findings illustrate a need for LGBTQ support resources related to cancer. However, very few support services addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ survivors exist. Cancer-related support groups often “use a one-size-fits-all model” and tend to introduce topics that will be relevant to a specific type or stage of cancer disregarding sexual and gender identity (Margolies, 2015). The present study examined sources of support for LGBTQ cancer survivors in Edmonton and Northern Alberta.

Methods

A search was conducted for both *cancer-related* and *general* LGBTQ support. Although cancer specific support sources are ideal, research suggests that these resources are limited. All of the sources located are specific to the LGBTQ community and are accessible to those living in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. To locate *cancer specific* sources of support for LGBTQ survivors, multiple online searches were conducted

using specific key terms such as *cancer support Canada*, *cancer support Alberta* and *cancer survivor LGBTQ support*. To locate *general* sources of support terms *LGBTQ* and *LGBTQ Support* were used followed by the names of cities and towns in Northern Alberta. The Pride Centre of Edmonton was also contacted. Here, all available resources were scanned and collected for further analysis. Once a sample of sources was identified, each of the 21 sources were examined for relevant information.

Five Online Sources of LGBTQ Cancer Related Support Were Located:



Source: www.lgbtcancer.org, www.cancercare.org, www.Malecare.org, www.cancer-network.org & www.cancerconnection.ca

Results

The results revealed 21 main sources of social support offering 57 programs for young LGBTQ survivors in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. For *cancer specific* LGBTQ support, 5 online sources of support were located offering 7 support groups for various sexual and gender identities. Only 1 of these sources was located in Canada (*CancerConnection.ca*). This website offers an online support group for lesbians and gay men. The remaining 16 sources offer *general* LGBTQ support for various ages, genders, and sexualities. Notably, The Pride Center of Edmonton offers 18 different programs and activities such as individual counselling, support groups, art programs, yoga, and a First Nations Two Spirit Gathering (*pridecenterofedmonton.org*). Other examples of support sources located in Edmonton include: *Haven* LGBT Christian Community (*Havenyeg.com*), The Landing Society for Gender and Sexual Diversity (*su.ualberta.ca/thelanding*), and InQueeries (*facebook.com/InQueeries*).

In Northern Alberta, the results revealed that only Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray have sources of support for LGBTQ individuals. The sources in Grande Prairie include: GALAP (*Galop.org*), The Grande Prairie Pride Society (*facebook.com/GPPrideSociety*), LGBTQ Youth Grande Prairie (*facebook.com/glbtyouthgp*) and The HIV North Society (*hivnorth.org/supportgrandeprairie/*). The 2 sources located in Fort McMurray are The Fort McMurray LGBTQ Social Group (*meetup.com/LGBT-YMM/*) and The Fort McMurray LGBTQUNITY (*facebook.com/LGBT/Fortmac*).

Discussion

The most significant finding was the lack of *cancer specific* LGBTQ supports available in Edmonton and Northern Alberta. The results revealed 5 online sources of support and only 1 of these is located in Canada. The National LGBT Cancer Network (*cancer-network.org*) and The National LGBT cancer Project (*lgbtcancer.org*) are U.S based organizations that provide valuable support and resources for LGBTQ individuals affected by cancer. However, no organizations like this exist in Canada. These results are troubling considering the demonstrated need of such services. For young adults, cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship can lead to social isolation and distress. This experience may be heightened for young adult LGBTQ survivors who may already experience alienation and distress unrelated to cancer. General cancer support groups may not address the unique needs and experiences of LGBTQ survivors. More supportive and inclusive services are needed to reduce distress and improve the quality of life for LGBTQ individuals affected by cancer. Additionally, there is a lack of general social support available in Northern Alberta as only 2 towns had such supports in place.

References

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