

Abstract

The present study examined the existing Canadian support programs that are available for young adult survivors suffering with psychological distress as a consequence of cancer. Results showed that there are numerous different support programs offered within Canada or that are accessible to Canadians via the internet. The findings entailed in this study demonstrate the availability and type of support programs existing that address psychological distress within young adult cancer survivors.

Introduction

Psychological distress is a pervasive and acute issue haunting today's Canadian society. Psychological distress refers to the unpleasant feelings and/or emotions that impact one's level of functioning; it includes issues such as post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety as well as any other issue that impacts psychological functioning. According to Canadian Mental Health Association (2016) psychological distress will affect every single Canadian at some point in their lives either through direct or indirect experiences.

Young Adult Cancer Survivors

Psychological distress is recognized as being particularly common amongst young adult cancer survivors aged 15 to 24 (Meeske & et al., 2001). A key challenge following completion of cancer treatment and the entrance into remission for young adult cancer survivors is coping with the emotional impact of the disease. Many young adult survivors struggle emotionally with sense-of-self, self-worth, understanding their survival, reoccurrence, disclosure of their experiences, establishment of relationships, feelings of social isolation, and loss of autonomy (D'Agostino & et al., 2013). As a result of prolonged living with and surviving of cancer and its associated emotional impact, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms/disorder and many other psychological issues have become a common occurrence among young adult cancer survivors.

Methods

Search strategies generated 198 cancer resources (N=198). The researcher then reduced the sample to 28 resources (N=28) by eliminating those that were not directed towards young adult cancer survivors with psychological distress and were not available to Canadians via the Internet or within Canada. A content analysis was then performed on the 28 resources and their associated support programs.



Source: Canadian Mental Health Association, (2016)

Results

The 28 support programs offered differ based on whether one is available to meet in-person or not, whether one wishes to engage with peers or professionals, and whether one desires to engage in a target-specific program or a program that will generally address the issue of psychological distress in addition to other issues associated with survivorship.

Online support vs. In-person Support

Fifty percent (N=14) were strictly in-person supports, 29 percent (N=9) were online supports, and 21 percent (N=6) were a combination of both online and in-person supports (see Table 1).

Peer support vs. Professional Support

Fifty-four percent (N=15) were a combination program (entailing peer and professional support), 28 percent (N=8) were strictly peer support and 18 percent (N=5) were professional support only.

Specific Support vs. General Support

Those that are target-specific (entail programs that place sole focus on psychological distress) represented 57 percent (N=16) while those that are general-target (entail programs that address psychological distress but the sole focus is not directly on psychological distress) represented 43 percent (N=12).

Name of Resource	Type of Support Program
Cancer Chat Canada	Online support - live chat
Cancer Connection	Online support - live chat, discussion forum, blogs
Health talk	Online support - live chat
2beme	Online support - discussion forum
Stupid Cancer	Online and in-person - live chat, podcasts, survivor retreats, meet-ups, survival summits
Young Adult Cancer Canada	Online and in-person - live chat, retreats, meet-ups, conferences
Young Survival Coalition	Online and in-person - survivor summits, discussion forum
Childhood Cancer Canada	Online - live chat, discussion forum
Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario (POGO)	Online and in-person - live chat, survivor conferences, counseling, after-care program
Teen Living with cancer	Online - live chat, discussion forums, blogs
Canadian Virtual Hospice	Online - live chat, support groups
Cancer care	Online - counseling, online support groups, blog
Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Support Programs	In-person - survivor events, meet-ups
RealTime Cancer	Online and In-person - discussion forums, meet-ups, live chats
The Self-Help Connection	In-person - counseling, peer support groups, workshops
Alberta health: Psychosocial and Spiritual resources	In-person - counseling, peer support groups
Wellspring Edmonton	In-person - counseling, peer support groups
Survive & Thrive Cancer Programs	In-person - survivor adventures, discovery camps meet-ups, peer support groups
Alberta Health: arts in medicine	In-person - creative outlets of expression emotions, counseling
Psychosocial oncology clinic	In-person - counseling, peer support groups
Cancer Rehabilitation Survivorship Program	In-person - counseling
iRest	In-person - counseling program
ELLICSR: Health Wellness & Cancer Survivorship Center	In-person - counseling, peer group support, workshops
You Can Connect	In-person - counseling, peer group support, workshops, survival conferences
20s & 30s Networking Group	In-person - peer group support, survival events
The Adolescent & Young Adult Oncology Program	In-person - counseling
Adult Childhood Cancer Survivorship Program	In-person - counseling, peer support group
Cancer Fight Club	Online and in-person - blog, discussion forum, meet-ups, survivor events, online professional

Conclusions

The present study highlights existing Canadian support programs available for young adult cancer survivors suffering with psychological distress. There are at least 28 resources within Canada or that are accessible to Canadians via the Internet that entail one or more support programs to those young adult cancer survivors with psychological distress. Furthermore, findings evidenced that there are multiple types of support programs based on whether one is available to meet in-person or not, whether one wishes to engage with peers or professionals, and whether one desires to engage in a target-specific program or a program that will generally address the issue of psychological distress in addition to other issues associated with survivorship. The researcher also concluded that there are combination programs.

References

- Canadian Mental Health Association. (2016). Fast Facts About Mental Health. Retrieved from <http://ontario.cmha.ca>
- D'Agostino, N.M. & Edelstein, K. (2013). Psychosocial Challenges and Resource Need of Young Adult Cancer Survivors: Implications for Program Development. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 31(6), 585-600. DOI: 10.1080/07347332.2013.835018.
- Meeske, K.A., Ruccione, K., Globe, D.R., & Stuber, M.L. (2001). Posttraumatic Stress, Quality of Life, and Psychological Distress in Young Adult Survivors of Childhood Cancer. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 28 (3), 481-489. Retrieved from <http://library.macewan.ca>

Acknowledgement:

The mentorship of Dr. Diane Symbaluk in Sociology 315.