Family assessment; is it the way of future care for oncology patients and their family?

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Introduction
The diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer in young women is a time of intense physical and emotional disturbance yet in most cases these women don’t go through this alone. They are closely supported by their family who also feel equally distressed and lost in the situation. During this time family communication will be disrupted, they will undergo role changes and their sense of control of the situation will be challenged as they attempt to adjust to the breast-cancer. This research explored the concepts of family strengths and resources in response to a diagnosis of breast-cancer from the family members’ perspective providing an insight into family adjustment.

Method
This exploratory descriptive study was based on the Family Resiliency Model. The sample of families (N=36) completed surveys and in-depth interviews providing new insights into the strengths and resources families draw on in response to breast cancer.

Results
Family dynamics were found to be an influencing factor on strengths and use of resources by individuals. Significant correlations between strong family commitment and seeking health professional assistance were established, identifying that families with poor commitment were less likely to seek assistance.

Conclusion
Internationally, simple family assessment is beginning to be introduced, providing an understanding of the family roles and psychosocial state of family members, thus allowing supportive care and information for family members. The evidence from this study suggests including family assessment in the care of oncology patients may provide a way to tailor the care of individuals in the supporting family.