

Including the family in the care of a young woman with breast cancer.

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Introduction

The journey for a young woman after a diagnosis of breast cancer is a balance of treatment and family commitments. Women under the age of fifty years often complete aggressive treatment schedules in response to their breast cancer diagnosis. Evidence suggests, that these women continue to maintain their role within their family, although they tend to experience difficulties specific to their younger age and phase of life (Bloom, Stewart, Chang, & Banks, 2004). This age group of women are closely supported by their family and friends yet little research has explored the family response to breast cancer. This research explored young women and their families' response during treatment for breast cancer identifying the strengths and resources the family use to support the woman.

Methods

A mixed method approach guided by the *Resiliency Model of Family Stress*, (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998) was used, to investigate the strengths and resources used by the family in response to breast-cancer treatment. A total of 111 participants, women with breast cancer and their family members completed the composite questionnaire; 23 personal interviews. A family case study analysis of the 36 families provided information on the family as a group's response to breast cancer treatment.

Results

The findings identified that family members want to support the younger woman, but were often unsure of direction within the health system. Family communication and appraisal of the breast cancer influenced the family response and overall family functioning. These factors were associated with the degree the family used external health professional support.

Conclusion

The inclusion of family in the discussions and care of a young woman will improve the health professionals understanding of the family. The strengths and resources of the family can be identified and guidance provided to improve the long term outcomes for the young woman with breast cancer.

Bloom, J., R, Stewart, S., L, Chang, S., & Banks, P., J. (2004). Then and now: quality of life of young breast cancer survivors. *Psycho-Oncology*, 13(3), 147 - 160.
doi: 10.1002/pon.794

McCubbin, H., I, Thompson, E., A, Thompson, A., I, & Fromer, J., E. (1998). *Stress, Coping, and Health in Families*. California: SAGE Publications.