

Enhanced Spiritual Transformation in Cancer Patients Following Intervention with Peer Patient Narratives

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Spiritual intervention information was developed based on peer patient narratives (a story written by a previous cancer patient about his/her experience with cancer, the treatment and side effects) and presented in video format (approximately five minutes) for six consecutive weeks to newly diagnosed cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy in Northwest Alabama. At the completion of the intervention period patients were assessed using the Spiritual Transformation Scale (STS; spiritual growth and spiritual decline) developed by Cole. Consecutive patients were asked to participate in the study. A total of 17 in each group have completed the study. The narratives were either spiritually oriented (as written by the patient, usually from a Christian perspective, demonstrating the ability to cope) or factually oriented (all references to the spiritual removed by JPD). Those patients exposed to the spiritually oriented narratives scored an average of 6.1 ± 1.0 on the spiritual growth portion of the STS compared to 4.7 ± 2.2 for the factually oriented narratives ($p=0.02$). However, the average spiritual decline score of the STS was 1.7 ± 1.2 and 2.0 ± 1.2 , respectively ($p=0.45$). The study is the first prospective study to demonstrate spiritual growth using interventional material written by patients having experienced similar life-threatening disease. In addition, commonly encountered objections to physicians' inquiry into the spirituality of patients were shown not to be a valid concern in this population of patients. (This study was initiated while JPD was a DMin student at GCTS).