

ABSTRACT

Relational Processes in Support-Related Communication Among Young Adults with Cancer

by

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Despite numerous studies reporting positive associations of social support with cancer-related quality of life, little attention has been paid to understanding how relational qualities (e.g., self-disclosure, perceived support member disclosure, perceived support member responsiveness) of cancer-related support exchanges might exacerbate psychological adjustment and intimacy among young adults with cancer. Little attention has been paid to understanding how young adults with cancer communicate with their social support networks among different modes of communication [(face-to-face vs. technology-related (e.g., text message, social media)]. This dissertation analyzed questionnaire data from 45 young adults with cancer to explore how aspects of relational disclosure and responsiveness about a cancer-related concern recently discussed with their support network may moderate the relationship between mode of communication and psychological adjustment and intimacy. No differences were found on psychological adjustment and intimacy across different modes of communication. Mode of communication moderated the relationship between self-disclosure and functional well-being and intimacy. Young adults communicating about a recent cancer-related concern face-to-face and reporting a low amount of self-disclosure was associated with greater functional well-being whereas young adults communicating via technology-related communication and reporting a high amount of self-disclosure was associated with greater intimacy. A small pilot study utilizing a biopsychosocial approach to analyzing dyadic face-to-face and text message content expressed by young adults with cancer and their support network is also presented. Study findings have psychological, behavioral, and clinical implications for future studies related to young adult cancer survivorship and suggest that communication via technology-related methods might not be detrimental to well-being. This dissertation provides new insight and a deeper understanding into the interaction of relational processes and differing communication modalities on adjustment among young adults with cancer.