



Abstract for the Society of Integrative Oncology

PATHFINDERS ABSTRACT

Background

Pathfinders is a mind-body-spirit, psychosocial model of personal recovery that supports cancer patients from diagnosis through treatment into survival or end of life. Launched in community oncology in Aspen CO, it is being tested for feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness in the academic setting at Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center, Durham NC. The Duke Pathfinders study is a prospective, uncontrolled, pilot study enrolling women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer and receiving chemotherapy, intravenous immunotherapy, or intravenous bisphosphonate therapy. This abstract presents interim data at study mid-point.

Methods

A 40-subject convenience sample is being enrolled over 1 year. Through an in-depth assessment, the Pathfinder, a licensed social worker, gathers patient data that enables tailoring of the intervention to individual needs and specifics. Working closely with the medical/ nursing team, the Pathfinder takes the patient through a transformative process that replaces fear-based perception with a view of reality based on love and acceptance. The program incorporates patient navigation, psychosocial care, mind/body techniques, referral to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), consultation on healthy lifestyle, self-care, life review, and end-of-life planning.

At five timepoints over 6 months, patients answer a symptom survey, the Patient Care Monitor (PCM, Supportive Oncology Services, Inc.), which asks 86 questions rating symptoms, psychological distress, and quality of life (QOL) on a series of six scales. Patients complete the PCM either (1) by using an e/Tablet, a wireless, notebook-and-pen style, personal computer in the Duke clinic, or (2) by filling out a paper questionnaire at home. Outcomes will be considered pre- and post-intervention, and will be compared against an historical cohort of similar patients. Qualitative data will be collected through narratives recorded at months 7 and 10; these include patients' experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness of intervention.

Analysis

Outcomes being studied include impact of Pathfinders on QOL and cancer-related symptoms, patient satisfaction, health resource (including CAM) utilization, lifestyle change, psychosocial function, adherence with care recommendations, and inflammatory markers.

Results

Recruitment began January 22, 2007. As of July 10, 22 patients have provided data at visit 1, 7 at visit 2, and 6 at visit 3. Demographic statistics to date include: 65% married; 70% white, 25% African American; mean age 54 years; 75% have some college or an advanced degree. Patients have had a mean of 1.73 visits (standard deviation 1.01) with the Pathfinder. Referral to complementary and alternative specialists was made for 50% of patients; all who received CAM referral received services which included acupuncture, massage, lymphatic drainage, and polarity therapy (energy balancing). Symptoms and concerns at baseline indicated by $\geq 50\%$ of subjects included: fatigue (100%), nervous/tense/ anxious (77%), trouble sleeping at night (77%), worry (64%), daytime sleepiness (59%), nausea (59%), dry mouth (58%), sad/depressed (55%), crying/feeling like crying (50%), dry skin (50%), feeling helpless (50%), and feeling hopeless (50%). Reduction in mean scores between visits 1, 2, and 3 was found for numerous symptoms and concerns, including those indicating physical functioning (attend social activities, cook for self, household work, pleasurable activities); those related to physical symptoms (constipation, difficulty breathing, dry eyes, dry mouth, fatigue, nausea); and psychosocial measures (crying/feeling like crying, decrease in appetite, feeling helpless, feeling hopeless, feeling worthless, feeling guilty).

Discussion

Models of care that address the full spectrum of cancer patients' needs are needed to address the lingering symptoms, reduced QOL, and psychosocial concerns of patients and survivors. Pathfinders is unique among mind-body-spirit and patient support or navigator programs in seeking to transform the patient's way of thinking, thus reframing his/her concepts of self, illness, wellness, life, and death. Personal recovery occurs as the patient learns to see him/herself in the context of a safe, meaningful, and kind universe. This study integrates quantitative and qualitative analyses, and uses novel technology for gathering patient-reported outcomes. Interim results show decrease in mean severity scores for several common cancer-related symptoms, with reduction seen especially in psychosocial measures. If proven feasible, Pathfinders could be tested for impact on various outcomes relevant to cancer patients' and survivors' well-being, using a more rigorous research design (e.g., randomized controlled trial).