

CUSOM Capstone 2026

Title

Journey Mapping: Evaluating Quality of Life Changes over Breast Cancer Treatment

Authors

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Background

While extensive study has been done on diagnostic evaluation, surgical technique, and reconstruction options for breast cancer patients, few studies have examined the quality-of-life (QoL) changes patients undergo over the course of treatment. This study sought to understand how patients perceived their QoL to evolve from pre-diagnosis to survivorship.

Methods

Patients in survivorship seen at a breast cancer center were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews via Zoom. Interviews centered around a journey mapping activity that asked participants to describe their QoL within physical, emotional, self-esteem, and sexual domains at various stages of their breast cancer journey. Interview transcripts were analyzed by two researchers using an inductive thematic framework.

Results

14 patients completed interviews. Six patients received breast conserving therapy, while eight patients received mastectomy (seven bilateral). Five main themes that impacted quality of life over time emerged: (1) perception of control and emotional well-being, (2) fear of recurrence, (3) experiences with hormone therapy, (4) evolution of breast cosmesis and self-image, and (5) coordination of care. Themes, sub-themes, and representative quotes are shown in Table 1.

Conclusions

Breast cancer diagnosis and treatment has a wide-reaching impact on multiple areas of QoL, lasting long into survivorship. While each patient experiences unique challenges, the common themes identified represent prime areas for provider education and counseling. Ultimately, understanding long-term QoL concerns allows for them to be discussed at diagnosis, thus improving expectation setting, prioritizing patient values in shared decision making, and expanding the level of care beyond treatment of physical disease.