Suffering in Advanced Cancer: A Randomized Control Trial of a Narrative Intervention

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Background
Advanced cancer often engenders existential angst and psychological suffering. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well, and its converse, suffering. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well; and its converse, suffering. Narrative interventions, such as support groups, illness education, and life review manuscripts, have been shown to improve the wellbeing of in-patient hospice and palliative care patients,4-7 but might not be feasible for widespread implementation. Our prior research suggested that pre-hospice patients could benefit from a life review/cancer narrative intervention8 [miLivingStory], using a telephone interview to elicit the life and illness story and online tools to support revising and sharing the study-delivered story manuscript, was found to be acceptable to diverse, community-dwelling cancer patients and resulted in the addition of social networking tools.[9]

Specific Aims
1. Test miLivingStory's effects on wellbeing and distress
2. Explore use of and satisfaction with miLivingStory

Methods
Recruitment: Patients with Stage III or IV cancer, receiving therapy from the University of Wisconsin's Carbone Cancer Center
Randomization: 1:1 in blocks of 10, stratified by gender and race/ethnicity,

Results
Baseline Characteristics: No between-group differences for this educated, primarily white, female sample with high well-being, except for lower levels of depression in the miLivingStory group. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well; and its converse, suffering. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well; and its converse, suffering. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well; and its converse, suffering. "Being at peace" is associated with dying well; and its converse, suffering.

Interventions
My Life, My Story Embryonic group:
a. An expert interviewee/author.
b. Elicted the story by recorded telephone interview, asking:
   • Can you tell me a little about your life history?
   • What are the most important things you have done or accomplished?
   • How has cancer affected you/your life?
   • In 20 or 30 years from now, what would you want your family, friends or loved ones to remember about you?
   • What have you learned about life and that you'd like to pass along?
   • Is there anything about you, your hopes/dreams that you'd want to share?

b. Wrote a coherent story from the transcript
c. Delivered the Story in paper and e-format to share with loved ones.

Online tools: Life review/social media; and information, support and planning tools hosted on the National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society websites.

My Own Resources (active control group):
1. NJC and ACS information, social support and planning tools

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Greater engagement increased satisfaction with telling and receiving the story.

References
1. Steinhauser. Factors considered important at the end of life by patients. [JAMA 2000; 284:2476-82]
3. NCI and ACS information, social support and planning tools