

**An Inquiry Into the Support Needs of Women Treated With Radiotherapy for Cervical Cancer**

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**Purpose:**

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women globally (Globocan cancer facts sheet, 2012). Almost nine out of ten cervical cancer deaths occur in less developed countries. According to the World Health Organisation and International Union against Cancer Care (2005), cervical cancer is most common in women living in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, it is most common amongst Black women (Ntinga & Maree, 2015). Unfortunately, more than half of the women seeking treatment have advanced cancer. Once the disease has spread beyond the cervix, surgery and radiotherapy are necessary to try to cure the disease. The support that the women receives can influence how she responds to the treatment. It is imperative that women receive support during this period, in an effort to help them adapt to the disease and the treatment.

The study explored how women treated for cervical cancer at an Academic hospital in Gauteng; South Africa preferred to be supported. Determine which support needs are crucial in meeting needs highlighted by the women

**Methods:**

A qualitative exploratory design was used. Purposive sampling was used to select 22 (n=22) participants who were 18 years and older, diagnosed with cervical cancer and receiving radiotherapy. In-depth interviews were conducted. An interview guide directed the interviews. Data were analysed using content analysis

**Results:**

Three themes emerged from the data, which were needs pertaining to information about the disease and its treatment; need for continuous counselling during treatment sessions was highlighted and tangible support such as assistance with finances to facilitate easy travel to treatment centre throughout the treatment period and support with basic needs such as food and maintaining of feminine hygiene. Women expressed need to have a care worker who would ensure their safety and comfort during treatment sessions.

**Conclusion:**

Women treated for cervical cancer needs to be informed about the disease and its treatment early in the disease trajectory. Counseling should be offered throughout the disease trajectory, in order to help women adapt to treatment. It is recommended that social services made available for those in need of financial assistance to resolve issues with travel to treatment facility and food supplies and feminine hygiene needs. It is recommended that a care worker be assigned to ensure women's comfort and safety after receiving radiation treatment. Also an education supportive programme is recommended to help women adapt to the disease aimed to improve their quality of life

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### **Keywords:**

Cervical cancer, support and treatment

### **References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

The study was conducted to explore the support needs of women treated for cervical cancer at an Academic hospital . Twenty-two qualitative interviews yielded three themes which are needs pertaining to information about disease and treatment, counseling throughout illness trajectory, and tangible support to ease travel to treatment site

### **Content Outline:**

Cervical cancer is a global health problem and a leading cause of female cancer deaths in developing countries. The diagnosis and treatment of this disease can have a profound effect on quality of patient's lives.

Treatment for cervical cancer entails intensive, toxic treatment consisting of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. Each treatment modality has its own complications. Advanced cervical cancer is treated

primarily with radiation alone. Unlike most acute side effects of treatment, late effects of radiation therapy tend to worsen over time. Being treated for cervical cancer may involve significant amounts of time away from home and can deplete reserves of energy resulting in a need for practical assistance with activities of daily living.

Health professionals are also faced with a task of effectively communicating with patients to explain the diagnosis and likely outcomes of interventions. Although client support is highly valued in nursing, it has been found that patient and their caregivers rarely received support from professional care givers. The study aimed to explore how women treated for cervical cancer would prefer to be supported in an effort to inform practice on their specific needs aimed to help women adjust to the illness and its treatment aimed to improve their quality of life

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**Author Summary:** Ms Mosalo is an oncology specialist nurse. Pursuing interest in breast and cervical cancer awareness and support. She is also involved in community support for families affected by cancer. She runs an outreach programme on cervical cancer screening at a local clinic In Pretoria, South Africa and surrounding clinics. She is pursing her PhD studies in cancer support