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Background

Cancer often leads to distressing symptoms such as pain, anxiety, and depression that can severely affect quality of life.^{1,2,3} Research shows that patients experience improved psychosocial adjustment when they receive loving, intentional support from their partners. Understanding how a partner prefers to receive love may be key to strengthening healthy communication and relationship satisfaction during cancer treatment.^{4,5,6} In 1992, Gary Chapman introduced *The Five Love Languages* (5LLs) model observing that individuals have preferred ways of receiving love, and that relationship satisfaction improves when partners express love in these “languages.” Adapting this framework to cancer care offers a novel approach to supporting couples.⁷

Objective(s)

1. Identify evidence-based methods and delivery formats to educate cancer patients and their partners on relationship and communication frameworks
2. Describe the impact of emotional support and healthy communication on the psychosocial well-being of cancer patients and their partners
3. Evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing relationship-focused interventions, such as the 5 Love Languages and More Than Words frameworks, in clinical settings

Methods

Study Population: Adults (≥18) diagnosed with cancer (i.e., patient) and their significant others (i.e., partner) who attended a Texas Oncology Couples Support Group.

Intervention: 6-week couples' support group developed in collaboration with Texas Oncology. Texas Oncology Social Workers adapted Gary Chapman's 5LLs to create and deliver the 6-week curriculum to meet the unique needs of patients with cancer and delivered the weekly content.

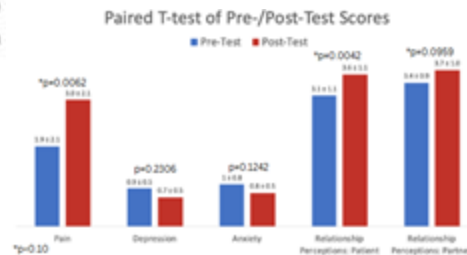
Assessment: Pre- and post- surveys administered to the patient and their partner.



Dependent Variable	Validated Scale	Items
Pain	Brief Pain Inventory-Short Form™	4
Depression	Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)	9
Anxiety	General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)	7
Relationship Quality	Couples Satisfaction Index™	7
Intervention Feedback	Researcher developed	12

Results / Conclusion

In 2024, the TxO and UTCOP collaboration began to explore how to broaden the program's reach. Feedback indicated interest in more inclusive approaches, particularly for LGBTQ+ couples. The team identified *More Than Words* (MTW) by John Howard as a complementary, evidence-based framework focused on universal communication strategies.⁸ A pilot presentation introducing MTW was delivered to Texas Oncology Social Workers to assess interest and feasibility. Survey responses expressed support for offering MTW in accessible formats such as brochures, serving as an introduction to deeper engagements like the 5LLs support group. Next steps include training providers on both the 5LLs and MTW frameworks and expanding access to these tools. By strengthening evidence-based emotional support resources, providers can play a vital role in healthy communication and relationship satisfaction among couples navigating cancer care.



Discussion

The results of this study indicate that employing the 5LLs in a couples support group may be an **effective tool** for providing **emotional support for cancer patients**.

Participants in this study reported **lower anxiety and depression symptoms** for selected items, despite a statistically significant increase in perceived pain severity over the 6-week intervention period.

Educating both cancer patients and their partners on supporting one another through the 5LLs was associated with **better overall relationship satisfaction**. This study encourages **continued attention to promoting mutual emotional support** between cancer patients and their partners, which may **improve relationship quality and increase patients' perception of quality of life** throughout the cancer journey.

Reference(s)

Please scan QR code for references



Disclosure

There are no disclosures to be made