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WeCanConnect: Development of a Community-Informed mHealth Tool for People with Disabilities and Cancer

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What Is the Purpose of this Study?

- To explore the cancer care experiences of people with disabilities diagnosed with cancer to identify their unmet support needs and priorities.

- To describe the development of an mHealth cancer support tool that integrates people with disabilities and cancer's perspectives to address these needs and priorities.

What Is the Problem?

- Cancer care for people with disabilities is rife with uncertainty and obstacles, not only from disease and treatment-related sequelae, but also from its impact on disabling conditions and functional capacity, and a health care system lacking accessibility and disability competence. As a result, people with disabilities and cancer often have unmet informational and social support needs.

What Are the Findings?

- People with disabilities experience many barriers across the cancer care continuum, including a lack of accessible services and disability competent providers.

- As a result, people with disabilities may feel socially isolated and often do not have practical, evidence-informed advice on how to manage their cancer and their disability together.

- Peer support can mobilize strengths within the disability and cancer communities to bridge some of these gaps. mHealth tools for a smart phone, tablet, or laptop hold promise to deliver peer support intervention in an accessible and scalable manner.

Who Should Care Most?

- People with disabilities with cancer should be aware of the power of peer support to help them navigate the uncertainty and isolation in cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship.

- Cancer care providers should understand the lived realities of people with disabilities and cancer, and tailor treatment plans and recommendations accordingly.

- Cancer support organizations and nonprofits should recognize disability as part of the human experience and provide inclusive, disability welcoming services and supports.

- mHealth and app developers should recognize people with disabilities as a potential beneficiary and consumer of their products and thus design products that are accessible and inclusive.

Recommendations for Action

- Cancer care facilities and providers must meet or exceed federal accessibility laws.

- Cancer care providers must be trained in disability competence as a part of their basic training and continuing education.

- People with disabilities and cancer should be encouraged to find peer support within both the disability and cancer communities.

- It is, therefore, essential that cancer support organizations embrace disability, whether preexisting or the result of cancer, as part of the human experience and ensure that their services are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming.

- Researchers should partner with members of the disability community to further understand and address the needs of people with disabilities and cancer.