



Understanding and meeting the needs of rural and regional radiotherapy patients

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Aims

Radiation therapy is often recommended in the treatment of cancer. It uses powerful beams of x-ray radiation to kill cancer cells by damaging their DNA (1). This project aims to identify knowledge gaps relating to radiation therapy among rural and regional patients, and develop informative videos to meet the educational needs of this patient cohort. The intention is that these videos be made available to patients prior to their first treatment.

Methods

A patient satisfaction survey was distributed to fifty patients from the Loddon-Mallee region of Victoria attending the Bendigo Radiotherapy Centre. The survey identified unmet educational needs and patient information preferences. The timing of information provision, and format and content of the videos was evaluated. Based on the results, four educational videos were developed using footage of a virtual radiotherapy environment (PEARL™) as well as footage of the local department and team. The virtual environment was used to visually aid in the explanation of radiation therapy concepts (Image 1). The videos were distributed to a second cohort of patients prior to commencing their treatment. A second patient satisfaction survey was subsequently distributed to these patients on day two of their treatment. This survey evaluated the content, timing and method of access to the educational videos.

Results

Initial survey results indicated all fifty respondents preferred receiving information prior to commencing radiotherapy treatment, either during their initial consultation or before their planning CT scan. Of these fifty patients, 63% indicated a preference for watching educational videos at home rather than at the hospital.

Themes that emerged relating to content included a preference for information regarding side effects from patients who had received breast cancer radiotherapy, and additional technical details about the treatment from men receiving prostate cancer radiotherapy.

The results of the second survey are currently undergoing analysis.

Discussion

Patients often fear radiation therapy due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of radiation therapy and associated side effects (2,3). Allaying these fears and misconceptions by providing accurate information about Radiation Therapy is crucial, as studies show that those who are less informed report an inferior quality of life and higher levels of anxiety and depression (4,5).

The feedback elicited from the surveys was used to inform the content and timing of delivery of the educational videos, focusing on palliative/general radiotherapy, breast, prostate and upper gastrointestinal tumours. The videos detailed the patient's journey from initial consult through to end of treatment and follow up.

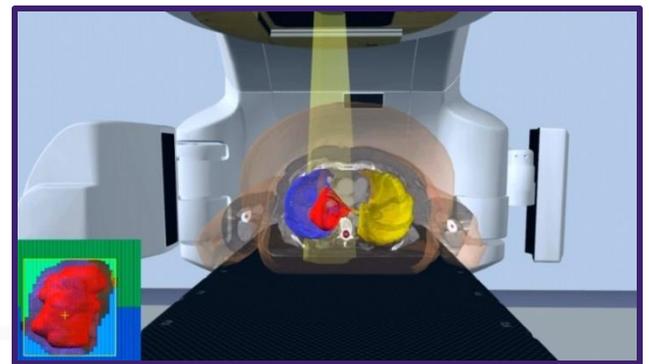


Image 1. Virtual radiotherapy environment (PEARL™) used in educational video

While the distribution of the initial survey was relatively straightforward, it was found that patient participation in the second survey was more problematic. There were a small number of patients who declined to watch the video as well as a small number of patients who did not recall watching a video upon receiving the second survey.

Early results of those who did recall viewing the video showed that the video was well received.

Conclusion

The project has identified a need in our region for additional education about radiotherapy. Thus far the videos created have been shown to be an asset in ensuring patients are fully informed prior to commencing radiotherapy. Once the feedback from the second survey has been applied to the videos, the videos will be distributed to patients as an ongoing resource.

Future plans include distributing a third survey to analyse the effectiveness of the videos in decreasing anxiety and increasing knowledge and understanding of radiotherapy.

References

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Video 1. Educational video given to radiotherapy patients