

Mental health care service experiences and needs in cancer survivors

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Background

There are more than 1 million cancer survivors living in Australia [1]

In a 12-month period, 40% of cancer survivors will experience a mental disorder; double the rate in the general population [2]. However, mental health issues are frequently ongoing [3] and may require long-term management in health care services.

Rigorous investigation of the mental health care experiences and needs of cancer survivors is lacking.

"I do think more mental health options should be provided...I am 1 year 3 months in and have battled with my mind [the] majority of that time. Yet have never been offered a mental health plan or counseling of any sort."

(F, 26-35 years, chronic myeloid leukaemia).



...were offered mental health care at diagnosis

Method

The study was a cross-sectional online survey using both qualitative and quantitative questions.

Participants with lived experience of a cancer diagnosis (at least 12 months ago) were recruited via paid advertisements and Australian Facebook cancer support groups.

A total of 131 people (male=12, female=112; 79.4% aged 56+ years) who had a wide variety of cancer types (see Fig 1) completed the survey.

Results

Only 34% (n=45) of people recalled being offered mental health care at the time of their cancer diagnosis. Some expressed disappointment at the lack of mental health care offered (see quote above).

Of those that reported accessing mental health care, half noted positive experiences such as being referred to specialists or their GP providing good care.

The other half noted major difficulties; however, this was primarily with a lack of access to care (rather than with the care itself (see quote below).

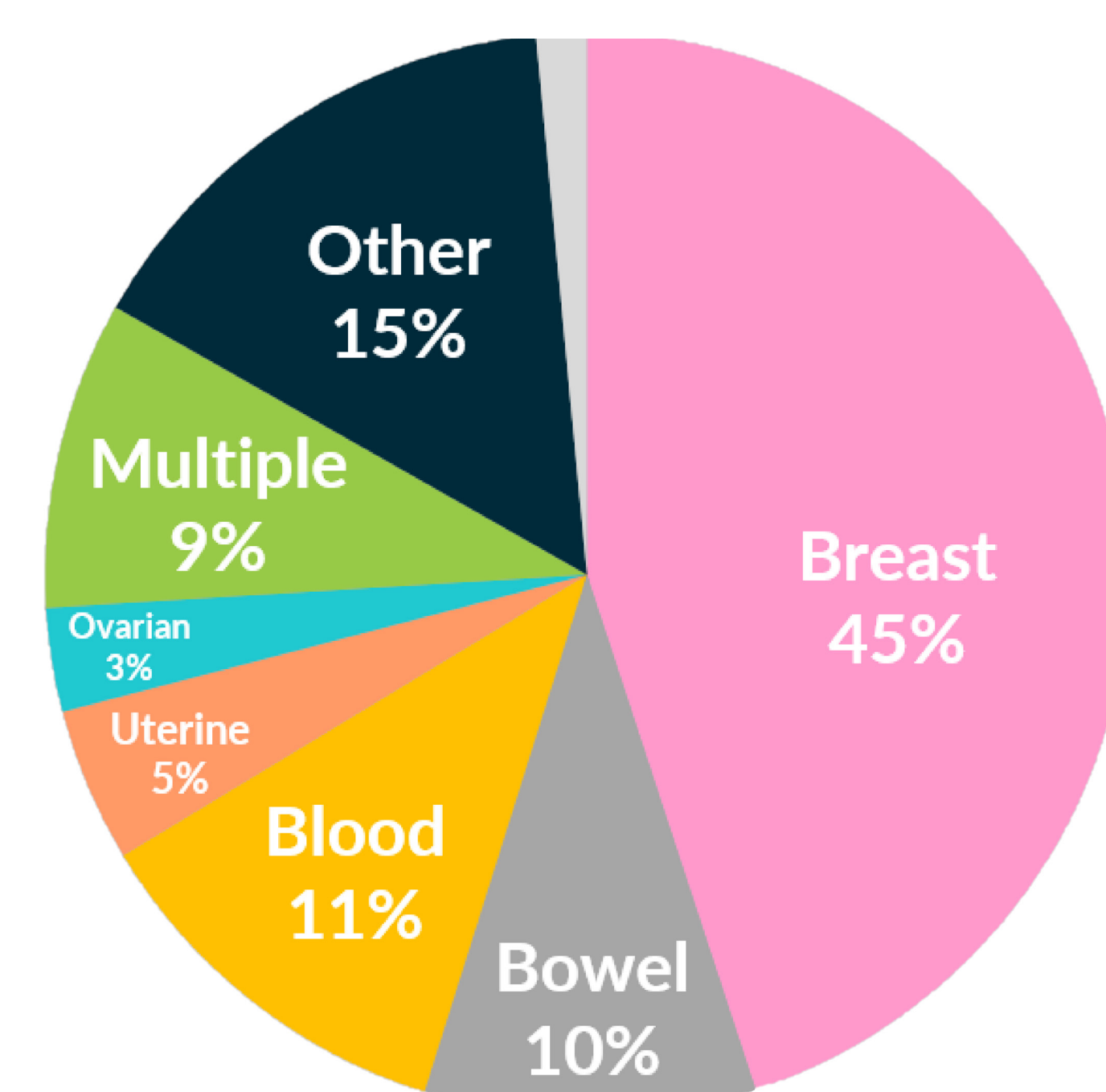


Fig. 1 Cancer type

"[It can be difficult] having to wait too long for appointments. I can manage but am concerned for people that need prompt treatment"

(F, 46-55, bowel cancer).

Conclusions

Cancer survivors may not be routinely offered mental health care, despite their perceived need for it.

It is important to facilitate early access to mental health care for those who may need it, and improve the accessibility (e.g., wait times) of ongoing mental health care for cancer survivors.

References

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3. Gotze, H., et al. (2018). Comorbid conditions and health-related quality of life in long-term cancer survivors-Associations with demographic and medical characteristics. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*, 12(5).