

Advanced cancer and sexuality, are they bedfellows?

**DR. MIRIAM COLLERAN
4TH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR OF THE PRC AND EAPC RN
OCTOBER 2014**

2

Patients Want to Discuss the Impact of Advanced Cancer on Their Sexuality

Research in Patients on Cancer and Sexuality

3

- Body image
- Early
- Mixed stages
- Survivorship
- Advanced cancer only
 - 16 studies, 2 case series, 1 case report



'The most difficult thing is the loss of physical contact; not being able to make love to my wife is almost unbelievable'

4

Christopher Reeve post neck injury. RIP



Quality of life is now recognized as an end point of secondary importance only to survival

·ASCO, JCO 1996



"Because I can no longer ignore death, I pay more attention to life."

**Treya Killam Wilber
Died of breast cancer RIP**

Sexuality WHO Working Definition 2006a

5

“ a central aspect of being human encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation

..... expressed in thoughts, fantasies practices, roles and relationships....

... biological, psychological political.... and religious and spiritual factors.”



Aims

6

- **To assess the impact of advanced cancer on patients' sexuality**
- **By determining the challenges arising and coping strategies**
 - **Raise awareness**
 - **Aid in the development of appropriate interventions**

Method

7

- A purposeful, random sample of patients with advanced cancer admitted throughout a specialist palliative care service were invited to participate
- November 2006 to April 2007
- Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Recruitment stopped when data saturation was reached
- Data was analysed using Grounded Theory to identify the codes, categories and themes

Method

8

▪Interviews:

▪Ranged from 17 to 75 minutes

▪6 hours and 30 minutes (approx) recorded

▪Time from interview to death:

▪Range 16 to 646 days

▪Mean of 122 days

▪Participants were offered copies of the transcripts

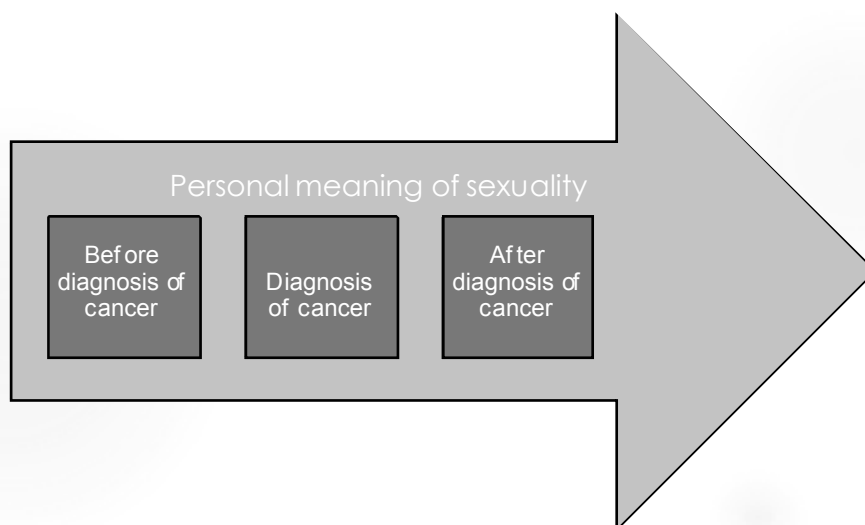
Results: Demographics of Patients

9

- 12 participants included:
 - 6 female and 6 male
 - 1 excluded due to loss of data
- Age range 33 to 87 years
 - Mean 67.7years
- Cancers:
 - lung (5), breast (2), prostatic (2), colorectal (1), multiple myeloma (1), lymphoma (1)
- Relationship status:
 - 6 married
 - 6 single (2 separated, 1 separated then estranged wife died, 2 widowed and 1 single/ never married.)

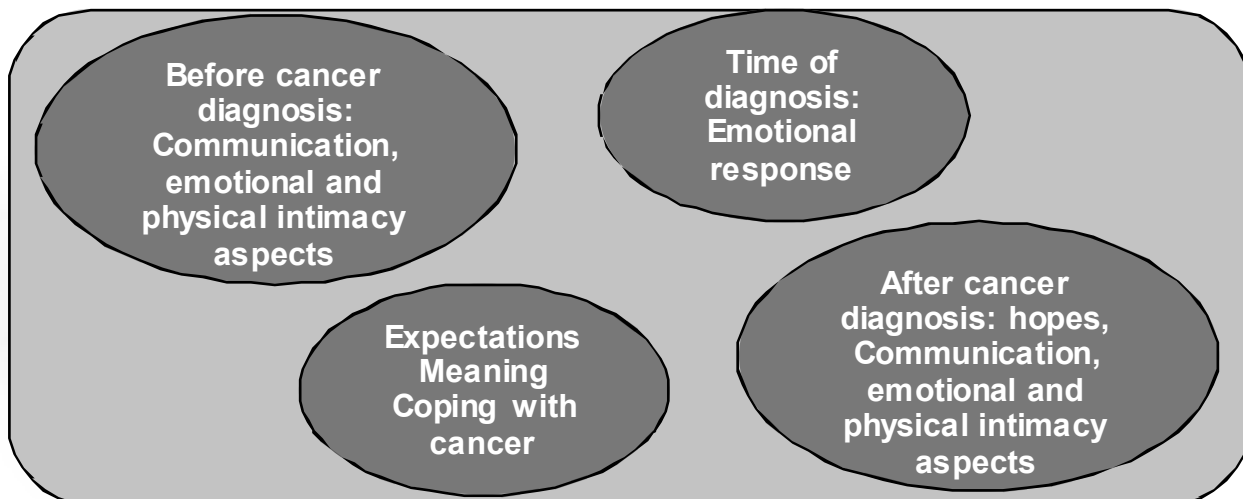
Themes identified by patients with advanced cancer

10



Themes and categories

11



Theme: Personal Meaning of Sexuality

Category: Personal Definitions

Womanhood:	Patient 3:	<i>"I don't know really, it's, it just means to me that I had two children and I was happy."</i>
Manhood:	Patient 2:	<i>"Well, well obvious, one obvious thing would be of course whether I would get erections."</i>

Theme: Personal Meaning of Sexuality

13

Category: Expectations of Sexuality with Aging

This question of my age... I am prepared to accept that, eh, sexuality does not play an important part in my life, in my thinking.'

Patient 2, a 77 year old man with prostate cancer



Theme: Personal Meaning of Sexuality

14

Category: Pre-existing Constructs of Sexuality

“I was married for three weeks before I interfered with my wife. Does that answer your question?”

....

“Before I ... before I molested her or had sex. So ... that answers your question.”

Patient 6, a 73 year old married man with lung cancer

Theme: Diagnosis of Cancer

15

Category: Emotional Impact

“Apparently this type of cancer is a death sentence.”

Patient 6, a 73 year old married man with lung cancer

“With the brain, I was given six months.”

Patient 5, a 33 year old married woman with metastatic breast cancer

Theme: After Diagnosis

16

Category: Coping with Cancer

- Endogenous Coping
 - Humour
 - Re-prioritisation
 - Belief systems including religiosity
- Exogenous supports
 - Spouse
 - Family and friends
 - Healthcare professionals

Theme: After Diagnosis of Cancer

17

Category: Body Image

- ▶ *“I went and got electrolysis ... I went in for, oh, I (pause) spent a good fortune on it (laughed)... but I didn’t care ... Every, every bit of pain was worth it ...”*

Patient 8, a 49 year old single woman with multiple myeloma on steroid-related hirsutism

- ▶ Patient 4, a 74 year old widow discussed her mastectomy for breast cancer

Theme: After Diagnosis of Cancer

18

Category: Single patients with advanced cancer & hopes of future romance

“There I was, you know and all of a sudden then, that whole area of life was gone, among a lot of things. But, I just got on with it.”

Patient 8, a 49 year old single woman with multiple myeloma



Theme: After the Diagnosis of Cancer

19

• Communication

“He always put me first, you know, so I’d say that’s love to me. I feel I had love up to the end ... you know it didn’t show you sex-ways but I had it. I feel I had it.” Patient 4, a 74 year old woman widowed after her mastectomy

• Non-intercourse intimate touch

• Shared bed - Patient 5, a 33 year old married mother with metastatic breast cancer

Theme: After the Diagnosis of Cancer

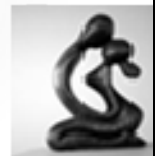
20

Category: Sexual intimacy

□ Reprioritisation

“Just to be bothered about sex ... there’d be more on the mind than that.”

Patient 6, a 73 year old married man with lung cancer



□ ***“We still have a sex life, eh, (pause) maybe not exactly as it used to be but (long pause) that’s to be understood, you know ... (pause) Your mind is preoccupied with other things.”***

Patient 7, a 57 year old married man with lung cancer

Theme: After the Diagnosis of Cancer

21

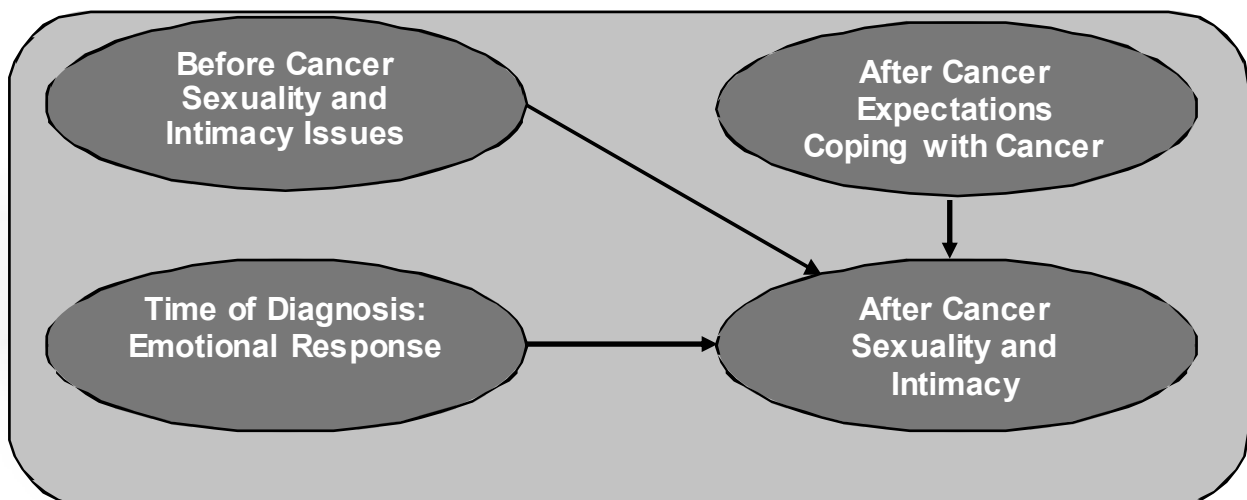
Category: Assessment of Sexuality in Advanced Cancer

- ***“If they could talk to one of them, suggest that they talk to both ... because obviously the partner would feeling it as well.”***

Patient 12, a separated 49 year old woman with advanced bowel cancer

Themes and categories

22



Conclusions

23

- ▶ Life Before and After the Diagnosis of Cancer
- ▶ Personal Definitions of Sexuality
- ▶ Holistic nature of sexuality
- ▶ Impact is Individualised and Variable
- ▶ Influencing Factors
- ▶ Sexuality is an Aspect of Quality of Life for Patients
- ▶ Patients Want to Discuss the Impact of Advanced Cancer on Their Sexuality

24

Thanks to



To all the patients who kindly participated

To the Specialist Palliative Care Teams in Our Lady's Hospice and St. James's Hospital, Dublin

Professor Declan Walsh
 Dr. Eileen Mannion
 Professor Ken O'Byrne
 Dr. Liam O'Sioráin
 Onja van Doorslaer
 Fiona Lawler