

Experiences and Concerns of Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual Survivors of Colorectal Cancer

Allyson Baughman, MPH, Melissa A. Clark, PhD, and Ulrike Boehmer, PhD

Baughman is a project manager in the Department of Community Health Sciences of the School of Public Health at Boston University in Massachusetts; Clark is a professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Shrewsbury; and Boehmer is an associate professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences of the School of Public Health at Boston University.

This research was funded by a grant (1R01CA181392-01A1) from the National Cancer Institute.

Clark and Boehmer contributed to the conceptualization and design. Baughman and Boehmer completed the data collection and provided the analysis. All authors contributed to the manuscript preparation.

Baughman can be reached at allysonb@bu.edu, with copy to editor at ONFEditor@ons.org.

Submitted July 2016. Accepted for publication September 20, 2016.

Keywords: colorectal cancer; cancer survivorship; sexual minority; patient experience; qualitative methodology

ONF, 44(3), 350–357.

doi: 10.1188/17.ONF.350-357

Purpose/Objectives: To identify the experiences and needs of lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) survivors of colorectal cancer (CRC) and to expand the current understanding of LGB survivorship by obtaining in-depth knowledge of survivorship among individuals with a cancer other than breast or prostate.

Research Approach: Qualitative, semistructured individual interviews via telephone.

Setting: Participants were recruited using social media, flyers, word of mouth, and contact with LGB and cancer organizations during a four-month period.

Participants: Eight LGB individuals with a diagnosis of stage III CRC from 2009–2014.

Methodologic Approach: All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis performed by more than one analyst was used for the interview transcripts.

Findings: Participants described experiences with social support and isolation, cancer care from an LGB perspective, and substantial economic impacts of their cancer diagnosis. In addition, they reported struggles with health insurance coverage, employment, and housing during and after their treatment for CRC.

Conclusions: In addition to issues regarding sexual identity disclosure and social support, economic impacts of CRC exist; these are likely critical to healthy survivorship in LGB men and women.

Interpretation: Attention should be paid to the economic impact of CRC on LGB individuals, along with issues of social support and sexual identity disclosure. Oncology nurses could play an important role in determining the economic and social needs of patients with CRC, accepting the often nontraditional support networks of LGB individuals, and facilitating disclosure of an LGB identity.

Colorectal cancer (CRC) is the third most common cancer in men and women (American Cancer Society, 2017). However, CRC survivorship is understudied. To the current authors' knowledge, CRC survivorship among lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) individuals has never been studied, despite research indicating that members of this population have greater risk factors for CRC (Institute of Medicine, 2011; Reuben, 2007), as well as higher CRC incidence, prevalence, and mortality (Boehmer, Ozonoff, & Miao, 2011; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011), than the general population. Some studies of LGB individuals' overall cancer survivorship included CRC along with other cancers (Margolies & Kamen, 2015; Matthews et al., 2016), but the experiences of LGB survivors were not analyzed by cancer type. What is known about LGB survivorship stems primarily from studies of breast or prostate cancer (Boehmer & Elk, 2015; Simon Rosser et al., 2016). Studies of survivorship by sexual orientation are inconsistent. Some have indicated that LGB and heterosexual survivors have similar quality of life, whereas others have concluded that LGB survivors