

Digital Storytelling as a Psychosocial Tool for Adult Cancer Survivors

Catherine M. Laing, RN, PhD, Nancy J. Moules, RN, BN, MN, PhD, Shane Sinclair, PhD,
and Andrew Estefan, RPN, DipNSc, BN, MN, PhD

PURPOSE: To understand the meaning and impact for adult patients with cancer (past or present) of creating a digital story related to their cancer experience.

PARTICIPANTS & SETTING: Ten participants made digital stories with the help of a research assistant trained in digital storytelling. This research took place in a large, urban center in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

METHODOLOGIC APPROACH: This research was done in the tradition of philosophical hermeneutics. Ten one-on-one interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed using an interpretive qualitative methodology.

FINDINGS: Findings revealed that digital stories were cathartic; reconnected individuals with family, friends, and parts of their lives that had been interrupted from cancer therapy; helped participants reflect in a way that was often described as therapeutic; and bridged communication with others about their cancer experiences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Digital stories can be used to highlight the immense psychosocial impact of cancer and point healthcare professionals and other researchers toward creative and nontraditional ways to address this issue.

KEYWORDS qualitative research; quality of life; coping; digital storytelling

ONF, 46(2), 147-154.

DOI 10.1188/19.ONF.147-154

Survival rates have increased, and the mid- to long-term psychosocial effects of cancer are still being discovered (Siegel, Miller, & Jemal, 2015). Understanding how to better address these issues can help healthcare providers tailor services, improving the quality of care. Digital storytelling may be one way to help individuals cope with the experience of cancer and may serve as a medium for healthcare professionals to better understand their patients' experiences. Although this medium has shown great promise with the pediatric oncology community, the effect of digital storytelling on adult patients with cancer has not been investigated (Laing, Moules, Estefan, & Lang, 2017a).

A digital story is a first-person perspective of an individual's experience told in a two-to-three-minute video. They combine moving and still images, music selected by the storyteller, and a voiceover narration told by the storyteller (Lal, Donnelly, & Shin, 2015; Storycenter, n.d.). Digital stories are a powerful medium to convey understanding as different forms of aesthetic combine to create enhanced meaning for the viewer (Lal et al., 2015).

The use of digital stories in health care is a recent phenomenon (Lal et al., 2015). Traditionally, they have been used as pedagogical tools with nursing and other health disciplines, with increased understanding, compassion, resilience, and empathy often noted as outcomes (Christiansen, 2011; Stacey & Hardy, 2011). Research related to digital storytelling has expanded to include patient perspectives and intervention strategies (Akard et al., 2016; Lal et al., 2015). When used as a legacy-making intervention in children with cancer, digital stories were noted to improve the quality of life of children with cancer and their families (Akard et al., 2016). Digital storytelling has also been successfully used as a way of understanding pediatric oncology survivors' experiences with psychosocial late effects of treatment (Laing, Moules, Estefan, & Lang, 2017a, 2017b). Although the goal of traditional digital storytelling is