Digital Storytelling as a Psychosocial Tool for Adult Cancer Survivors

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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...