Study Suggests Digital Health Tools Can Help Cancer Survivors When Used as Designed

New study results suggest that to maximize effects of digital support tools for cancer survivors, it is essential to personalize information and increase engagement efforts. The report, appearing in the journal, *CANCER*, demonstrated significant improvement in the ability to manage cancer issues, such as fatigue and fear of cancer recurrence, among those who used digital support program, but not among survivors who did not.

To learn more about how digital health interventions can help cancer survivors, investigators led by Corinne Leach, PhD, MS, MPH, senior principal scientist at the American Cancer Society, conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in a sample of 176 cancer survivors assessing effectiveness of and engagement with the eHealth program called Springboard Beyond Cancer (SBC), a web- and text- based self-management program for cancer survivors and caregivers. This RCT compared the differences between self-efficacy of the enhanced SBC intervention versus a website with the same content without the dynamic interface.

“This is the first evaluation of this digital health tool for cancer survivors and will help inform future work and programs offered to survivors and their families,” said Dr. Leach. “Cancer survivors often need to learn new strategies to effectively manage cancer-related concerns and ways to continue or adopt new behaviors, such as healthy eating and being physically active consistent with ACS nutrition and physical activity guidelines.”

Improved confidence in managing cancer-related issues, the primary outcome of this trial, increased significantly within the intervention program. Additionally, participants with moderate-to-high engagement in the text and/or web intervention had a significantly greater confidence in managing cancer-related issues, such as fatigue and communication with healthcare providers, compared to the control group, with a medium effect size.

“The results from this and prior digital health randomized controlled trials suggest that eHealth and mHealth tools can work for those who engage as designed, but do not always work for everyone,” the authors conclude. "This research is exciting as we think about how to deliver better, more personalized support to cancer patients and their families through digital channels.”

Article: Leach CR, Hudson SV, Diefenbach MA, Wiseman KP, Sanders A, Coa K, Chantaprasopsuk S, Stephens R, Alfano CM. Cancer Health Self-Efficacy Improvement in a Randomized Controlled Trial. *CANCER.* doi: 10.1002/cncr.33947.