

REVIEW ARTICLE

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## Informal education and health promoting approaches in adult cancer survivors

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### Summary

*This review looks at the available data relating to the informal education aspects and other health promoting approaches applied by adult cancer survivors to reduce the risk of cancer. The implications of such behavioral interventions on oncology practice are discussed. We also highlight areas of future research to pursue.*

*Available data show that many cancer survivors remain engaged in risky health behaviors post-diagnosis, which are associated with an increased risk of disease's recurrence. However, over the last years patients seem to increasingly receive adequate risk-based medical care. The application of appropriate informal education approaches, such as diet, exercise, and cessation of former unhealthy habits, such as smoking and alcohol has facilitated behavioral changes in cancer survivors, thoroughly improving their well being and overall quality of life (QOL).*

*Most of the research studies published to date have applied structured lifestyle interventions on intensive, individualized counseling sessions delivered by trained personnel or psychosocial-based mediations and reported that these approaches are largely effective in promoting the adoption of a healthier lifestyle in cancer survivors. These interventions have been reported to reduce the risk of cancer recurrence and thus to obtain an obvious positive impact on their well-being and overall QOL.*

*However, there is still insufficient evidence to conclude and support with confidence the effectiveness of any of these behavioral interventions and therefore future interventions should be initiated to assess the long-term effects and validating outcomes of lifestyle and other psychosocial interventions.*

**Key words:** attitudes to cancer, cancer survivors, health promotion, informal education, lifestyle interventions, quality of life

### Introduction

Disclosing the diagnosis of cancer emerges as a central organizing construct that evokes transformational changes in patients. Such a diagnosis results in a constellation of attitudinal and behavioral change across the lifespan in those who have achieved to survive [1]. Over the last years, the continued advances in early detection and therapy of cancer have led to a significant increase in the population of cancer survivors [2]. However, it should be acknowledged that they will have to cope with several long-term health and psychosocial difficulties, some of which are enduring. As a result, different coping strategies are adopted by cancer survivors to maintain increased control and mastery of their lives [3].

Coping with cancer is considered a potent predictor of QOL, rather a medical variable [4]. As such,

it is critical to identify and establish the best long-term coping strategies and interventions that promote the best possible normalization of life for cancer survivors. Hence, the need for establishment and clinical application of effective health promotion and lifestyle interventions in cancer survivors in order to best possibly cope with their illness is obvious.

To integrate and effectively apply health promotion and informal education approaches into oncology care has attracted to date relatively little attention as literature contains only few studies prospectively evaluating lifestyle changes and health education curricula. Those studies attempt to reduce the vulnerability of cancer-related health risks and also the emergence of health risking behaviors and have an overall objective to achieve a better QOL in cancer survivors [5]. Current knowledge shows that patients should be aware about