

GAINING UNDERSTANDING OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADITIONAL HEALERS' MANAGEMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA FOLLOWING BREAST CANCER TREATMENT: BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR A SYNERGISTIC MODEL OF BEST PRACTICES

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As of 1999, breast cancer (BC) was the leading cause of cancer diagnosis in South African women, affecting 1 in 12 Caucasian and 1 in 18 ethnically diverse South African women. In order to improve BC survivorship, the Universities of Missouri and the Western Cape in South Africa are collaborating with the goals of increasing understanding of BC survivors' and traditional healers' (THs') ways of managing lymphedema secondary to breast cancer treatment (BCLE).

The purpose of this research is to more fully understand THs' identification and management of BCLE. Secondarily, we want to propose a best practices model reflecting the synergistic combination of Western and traditional medicine for BCLE treatment and prevention.

Qualitative methods were utilized. Interviews with three THs in South Africa were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. Data were audio-taped, transcribed, and reviewed for recurring themes. Themes were extracted by the first author using editing style analysis, and reviewed by the entire team for validation, representativeness, and sufficiency.

Themes included folk medicine training, multidisciplinary collaboration, perceptions of cancer, disease characteristics, and disease management. Findings suggest the early stages of a dynamic and complementary relationship exist between THs and practitioners of Western medicine. Facilitating collaboration between THs and practitioners of Western medicine concerning the management of BCLE and other treatment-related symptoms is recommended for further study.

Finally, this new understanding will be used to design evidence-based intervention(s) which synergistically combine the best practices of Western and traditional medicine for survivors living with and at risk of developing lymphedema.