Background:  
- Adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer patients and survivors are between the ages of 15 and 39 years old.  
- AYA cancer patients and survivors may experience unique stressors due to their age.  
- Expressive writing (EW) has been shown it can be used as a method to safely cope with thoughts and improve both mental and physical health.  
- As the incidence of cancer in the AYA population increases, the number of cancer survivors increases.
- The purpose of this study was to identify the salient aspects of the cancer experience for adolescent and young adult cancer patients and survivors through EW.

Procedure:  
- 21 AYA breast cancer patients and survivors within three years of diagnosis  
- Conducted completely online  
- Read positive messages intended to elicit positive emotions before writing essays  
- Wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings around a stressful experience  
- Wrote for 30 minutes once a week for three weeks

Methods:  
1. This study was approved by the MD Anderson IRB, and all researchers involved in the study were trained in human subjects training.  
2. Manipulation check of essay prompt by 2 reviewers  
3. Coded essays line by line (highlighted raw data and labeled with descriptive code)  
4. Accumulated and grouped codes into themes  
5. Eliminated themes with less than 5 codes  
6. Further grouped codes into sub-themes within each theme  
7. Eliminated sub-themes with less than 5 codes  
8. Listed sub-themes in decreasing order within each theme to determine frequency of codes  
9. Categorized themes as either “Positive” for positive aspects or “Negative” for negative aspects of the cancer experience

Results:  
- Positive Feelings:  
  1. General gratitude for life  
  2. Gratitude for others
- Support:  
  1. Support from family and friends  
  2. Support from faith or religion  
  3. General support  
  4. Deeper relationships with others  
  5. Support from other cancer patients and survivors
- Post Traumatic Growth:  
  1. Goals to support and advocate for cancer patients  
  2. Shift in perspective on life  
  3. Personal growth  
  4. Shift in perspective on relationships  
  5. Goals for career  
  6. Goals for family life  
  7. General goals  
  8. Hopes for a cure for cancer

Conclusions:  
- The participants’ EWs revealed positive themes of positive feelings, support, post traumatic growth, and positive coping mechanisms, and negative themes of negative feelings about the cancer experience, lack of support or isolation, negative physical effects, and negative coping mechanisms.
- Unlike previous studies, financial and fertility concerns were not identified as major concerns for AYA cancer patients and survivors in this study, but looking at the demographics of this sample, most participants had an established income and children before or during cancer treatment.
- Identifying the unique aspects of the AYA cancer patient and survivor population through EW could be useful in the future for the betterment of cancer treatment and cancer prevention. For example, because support was identified as a main theme in the EWs, incorporating social support in cancer treatment could improve the quality of care and possibly prevent cancer by improving the lives of patients and survivors.

Demographics:  
- 45 essays total  
- Age: $M = 34.54$, $SD = 3.32$  
- Race: 75% Caucasian/White, 4.17% African American/Black, 4.17% Asian, 8.33% Native American/Alaska Native, 8.33% Mixed Race  
- Education Level: 4.17% High school graduate, 8.33% Some college or specialized training, 50% College degree, 37.5% Post-graduate degree  
- Average Annual Household Income: 4.17% Less than $15,000, 8.33% $15,000-$45,000, 20.83% $45,001-$75,000, 66.67% More than $75,000  
- Number of Children under 18: $M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.24$

References:  

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