FINANCIAL TOXICITY EXPERIENCED BY CANCER PATIENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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BACKGROUND

Financial toxicity refers to the negative impact that high treatment costs have on cancer patients. This study aims to elucidate the drivers and magnitude of financial toxicity among cancer patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) and compare their experiences to those of English-speaking patients in the same clinic. We hypothesize that patients with LEP experience greater financial toxicity than their English-speaking counterparts.

METHODS

We conducted interviews with 10 patients (7 English-speaking and 3 with LEP) using a mixed-methods approach that included a quantitative survey followed by a qualitative interview. All participants were cancer patients actively receiving treatment at Harborview Medical Center. The quantitative survey assessed out-of-pocket (OOP) costs over the past four weeks and measured financial toxicity using the validated FACIT-COST inventory. The qualitative interview guide was developed by reviewing key literature on financial toxicity.

RESULTS

Table 1. Out of Pocket Costs, Stratified by Language Spoken

Average out of pocket costs	English Group	Limited English Proficiency (LEP) group
Prescription medications	$100.13 (SD $165)	$11.67 (SD $20)
Outpatient appointments	$0 (SD $0)	$144.44 (SD $250)
Travel	$7.24 (SD $10)	$56.67 (SD $51)
Total:	$107.37	$212.78

Table 2. FACIT-COST Scores by Question, Stratified by Language Spoken

FACIT-COST Questions	Average FACIT-COST Score by Question for the English group	Average FACIT-COST Score by Question for the LEP group
Savings to cover cancer care	1.14	1
Out of pocket medical expenses	2.43	1.33
Future financial worry from cancer payments	1.71	2.33
Perceived control over amount spent on cancer treatment	2.57	2
Frustration from cancer causing physical limitations	1.14	1
Satisfaction with current financial situation	1.29	1
Ability to pay for monthly expenses	2.29	1.33
How much financial stress	2.57	1.67
Concern with keeping job and income	2.43	1.67
How much cancer/treatment decreased financial satisfaction	2.57	2.33
Amount of control over financial situation	1.57	1
Average total FACIT-COST Score (out of 44)	21.71	16.66

*Lower FACIT–COST scores indicate greater financial toxicity

DISCUSSION

- Patients with LEP faced higher OOP costs on average, primarily due to increased expenses for outpatient appointments and travel.
- Patients with LEP had a lower average FACIT-COST score than English-speaking patients, both overall and in nearly every individual category.
- The largest differences in FACIT-COST scores between English-speaking and LEP patients were found in OOP medical expenses, the ability to pay for monthly expenses, and the level of financial stress experienced.
- LEP patients emphasized the crucial role translators play in delivering quality healthcare.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate that patients with LEP generally paid higher OOP costs compared to English-speaking patients. Table 2 shows that the LEP group experienced greater financial toxicity on almost every measure. Considering the qualitative themes, the subjective impact and toll of financial toxicity on LEP patients could be specifically assessed in clinical settings with large numbers of immigrant patients to better serve these populations.

Summary

In this study, we found that patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) experienced a greater financial burden from their cancer treatment compared to those who could communicate effectively in English. In clinical settings, healthcare workers should identify and address these financial burdens that disproportionately affect LEP patients to provide them with higher quality care. Some of these financial burdens may stem from paying higher out of pocket costs for outpatient appointments and travel than their English-speaking counterparts.