



Indigenous cancer survivorship, visual arts and storytelling

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Background

- Compared to non-indigenous, Indigenous peoples in Canada experience:
 - higher cancer &
 - lower five-year cancer survival rates
- Health disparities attributed to a history of colonization & neocolonialism

Project History

Visualizing Breast Cancer: A pilot photovoice study

- Goal: To qualitatively describe the meaning of breast cancer and survivorship
- Participants (n=12) First Nations & Métis women in Saskatchewan
- Methods: Photography, interviews & focus groups
- Emerging themes:
 - Intersection of multiple marginalizations
 - Cultural silence about cancer
 - Vital role of cultural & community resources when facing cancer

The National Picture Project

- Goal: To advance knowledge about the challenges, strengths & resilience of Indigenous peoples faced with cancer
- Participants: (n=87) from 5 Indigenous communities
- Methodology: Qualitative, participatory, arts-based study

Methods

- A blend of photovoice, journaling and oral storytelling:
 - Each participant was loaned a digital camera and provided with a journal
 - Participants could include drawings, beadwork, clippings, and other creative materials if they wished
- During individual interviews, participants were asked to:
 - describe 3-5 photos that were meaningful to them
 - reflect on their experience of journaling
- During focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on whether and how their stories might:
 - benefit their communities
 - contribute to improving health services for Indigenous peoples
- Creation of a video to capture findings
- Community video screening with facilitated discussions and survey to understand perceptions of video & satisfaction with process

A selection of visual and narrative data from The National Picture Project



“...this is my first star blanket that I made. It’s about 20 years old. These are kind of prized amongst Indigenous people. You earn them when you go through [hardships] and through achievements...It represents God’s eye. And this whole process has actually been reconnecting with God, my connection. .. when you’re really connected to who you are, you’re guided to what you need.”



“... when (my aunt) was diagnosed I was looking online for how Ojibway people deal with death and things. I came across this article on the path of souls and the constellations and they mentioned the constellation Orion, which I think is what this painting is supposed to represent but in the Ojibway way. These are canoes of souls travelling up to the stars.”



“When I got sick... I said, "K., if I die will you take care of my kids"? And she said yes. And, then, she made those slippers. They're beautiful, [the pink ribbon is] for breast cancer. ..I really love them. It's really something that means a lot to me.”

Findings & Discussion

- The Indigenous concept of holism conveys a belief in the interconnectedness of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, & physical realms of life
- Many stories in our study reveal sustaining connections:
 - with family
 - with nature
 - with Indigenous beliefs & traditions
- Beading & other cultural traditions helped participants integrate stories from non-indigenous culture into Indigenous understandings of healing

Cultural Safety

- Requires acting in ways:
 - That recognize, respect & nurture the unique cultural identity of marginalized cultures
 - To safely meet their needs, expectations and rights
- A concept and practice introduced by nursing professionals in New Zealand

Conclusion

- Familiarity with Indigenous values & traditions can guide non-indigenous healthcare practitioners towards:
 - Culturally safe practices
 - A more nuanced understanding of Indigenous cultures
- Understanding the intersections between health, visual arts & storytelling could lead to:
 - New forms of support groups
 - A conversational bridge between non-indigenous & Indigenous cancer care

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