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Contribution ID: 107

Type: 3 - Talk

“Let’s talk exercise and cancer”: Understanding barriers and facilitators of exercise communication between healthcare professionals and individuals with cancer –An International focus group study

Thursday 23 July 2026 11:00 (15 minutes)

Purpose

To effectively integrate exercise into cancer rehabilitation for survivors, families, and caregivers, it is essential to understand barriers and facilitators influencing patient-centered communication and shared decision-making about exercise. Both survivor and health-care professional (HCP) perspectives matter and may differ in how they view the role of exercise, the challenges in discussing it, and the support needed. Understanding these barriers and facilitators will support development of evidence-based exercise-oncology communication standards that fit existing healthcare systems.

Methods

As part of the LION-COM sub-study within the multinational, EU funded PREFERABLE 2 study, totally ten focus groups were conducted in Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden from April –December 2024. In each country, one focus group was conducted with survivors who had completed primary curative cancer treatment and one with HCPs working within cancer care. The transcripts of the semi-structured discussions were transcribed verbatim, translated to English, and analyzed inductively using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results

We developed four main themes from the focus groups with survivors: Bringing up the topic, The silent gaps behind the conversation, Opening the door to more effective communication, Need for more than just advice. Parallely, four main themes were developed from HCP focus groups: Exercise conversations compete with the realities of cancer care, Unclear ownership and professional boundaries create a communication gap, Trust and quality shapes meaningful conversations, Cultural and personal norms impact deeper communication.

Conclusions and Implications

While survivors seek proactive, personalized conversations, HCPs report systemic constraints, unclear roles, and cultural factors that hinder dialogue. Overcoming these major communication gaps might facilitate integrating exercise into routine care. Addressing these gaps requires clear guidelines, structured communication strategies, and role clarification to empower HCPs and foster shared decision-making. These insights can inform evidence-based communication standards for exercise oncology, aligning with healthcare systems and improving rehabilitation outcomes.

Keywords

Exercise communication, exercise oncology, shared-decision making, patient-centered

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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Session Classification: Oral Session