Background

- Economic burden of cancer care is an emerging concern in the United States
- The potential financial toxicity of breast cancer care at the patient level remains poorly understood.
- As much as 47% of people with cancer in the United States report “catastrophic” levels of financial hardship
- Patients with financial hardships are four times less likely to rate their quality of life as excellent or very good

This study aims to:

Characterize the scope of the contributors to financial distress on breast cancer patients and the resources utilized to address them

Methods

- Retrospectively evaluated adult female patients diagnosed with invasive breast cancer or ductal carcinoma in situ between 2014 and 2019 at a single institution.
- Those who enrolled in copay assistance or indicated financial assistance.
- A mixed methods design was used to investigate financial distress patients faced
- For the quantitative component, a web-based survey was delivered to patients meeting criteria via Research Electronic Data Capture.
- For the qualitative portion we performed semi-structured interviews to further explore sources of financial distress which were analyzed by two researchers using grounded-theory methodology.

Results

- 68 patients completed the online survey, 15 of the 68 also participated in semi-structured phone interviews.
- On the online survey 74% of participants endorsed a financial distress score ≥5 on a scale of 0-10. 74% changed their budget, 72% used their savings, and 60% cut down on spending.
- 40% used resources such as financial counseling or financial assistance.

Conclusions

- Many breast cancer patients experience significant financial distress, and do not have access to the resources they need.
- Patients expressed that they would best be served by having access to easy-to-navigate financial resources made available near the time of diagnosis with additional follow up as needed.
- This study highlights the need for financial transparency, supportive financial services, and counseling at the time of diagnosis, throughout treatment and beyond.

Future Directions

- We plan to evaluate distress longitudinally in order to be able to provide resources as needed throughout treatment.
- We aim to utilize our nurse navigators to administer the distress screening tool throughout breast cancer treatment to better identify patients with worsening or new distress so we can provide proactive, individualized supportive services.

Selected References


Disclosures

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Fig. 1. Distribution of Financial Distress Scores.

Fig. 2. Financial Adaptations Due to Breast Cancer Diagnosis.

Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview Codes and Sample Quotes

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| Costs | Insurance | "We had to send different deductibles, so there’s just been a lot of money going to medical bills that we were not able to pay."
| Costs | High Deductions | "I’m losing my job because of everything.”
| Costs | Out of Network Providers | "I was refused by several hospitals… I was going to take years.”
| Costs | Out of Pocket Medical Costs | "The bills from the hospital… I’m only going to be paid $500 per session and the doctors charged more than that.”
| Costs | Physical Therapy | "I have to have my leg surgery in the summer… I’m paying like $200 per session and the doctors charged more than that.”
| Costs | Pocket Non-medical Costs | "I have to have my leg surgery in the summer… I’m paying like $200 per session and the doctors charged more than that.”
| Costs | Travel and Parking | "I had to travel to get to my medical appointments.”
| Costs | Lodging | "I had to travel to get to my medical appointments.”

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| 1 | Unemployment | Job Loss | "Do you feel like you’ve had financial issues that just made it hard to make ends meet.”
| 2 | Limited Spending on Leisure Activities | Missed Work for Treatment | "You minimize expenses entirely because you have to make ends meet.”
| 3 | Early Retirement Withdrawal | Early Resource Information | "You minimize expenses entirely because you have to make ends meet.”
| 4 | Use of Savings | Use of Savings | "I’m going to take years.”
| 5 | Missed Work for Treatment | Missed Work for Treatment | "I was refused by several hospitals… I was going to take years.”
| 6 | Job Loss | Job Loss | "Do you feel like you’ve had financial issues that just made it hard to make ends meet.”

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