

Women Report Less Satisfaction, More Challenges with Cancer Care

Women were more likely to feel they had to “prove” their symptoms

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Female cancer patients are less satisfied with the quality of their cancer care than male cancer patients and are more likely to report that their symptoms were not taken seriously and that they had to prove their symptoms to providers.

According to the latest Survivor Views survey from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), while cancer patients overall report feeling very confident in the quality of their care (84%), women were twice as likely (14% vs. 7%) to feel only “somewhat” confident about the quality of their care and women whose cancer was diagnosed after experiencing symptoms, were also more likely to report that their symptoms were not taken “very seriously” (31% vs. 21%) or not taken seriously “at all” (8% vs. 1%) compared to men.

Some of the most common experiences of dissatisfaction among cancer patients include roughly 1 in 10 who felt that their symptoms were ignored or dismissed (12%) or had to push for tests their providers didn’t want to order (11%), and 1 in 8 who had to see multiple providers to get a diagnosis (9%). Women were more likely to feel they had to prove their symptoms to a dismissive provider (8%) and were twice as likely than men to say they had to report their symptoms five or more times to their provider before they received the care that led to their diagnosis (6% vs. 3%).

For example, one survey respondent replied, “I began seeing my PCP over a year before I was diagnosed with Stage III cancer. I was told to reduce stress and follow up...I was told I should attend therapy and possibly take anti-depressant medication. As a busy working woman in my 30s, I feel all of my symptoms were dismissed because I didn’t fit the mold of what cancer looked like.”

“Having to prove your symptoms or bring them up repeatedly in order to get a diagnosis is a burden no cancer patient should face,” said Lisa Lacasse, president of ACS CAN. “We need to make sure people’s symptoms are taken seriously and all cancer patients—regardless of gender—receive high quality and respectful care.”

Among the patients and survivors surveyed, one-third sought additional care, like a second opinion or additional testing, after feeling their symptoms were being dismissed; of those nearly half

(48%) reported receiving their cancer diagnosis or getting a corrected cancer diagnosis as a result. Women were three times more likely than men to say their diagnosis changed as a result of additional care after feeling their initial concerns were not taken seriously.

One respondent wrote, “My doctor did not believe me when I said I had pain in my breast. He put his hand on my knee and told me to smile when I became upset. It wasn’t until my new oncology team that I felt supported or heard.”

“In order to end cancer as we know it for everyone, we need to ensure everyone is treated equally. Providers need to consider and correct any possible gender bias in how they treat patients. To do otherwise risks needless suffering and delayed diagnosis which could result in avoidable death from this disease. And having access to patient navigators – who can help answer questions and listen to patient concerns would also be an important step,” said Lacasse.

The poll of 1,236 cancer patients and survivors was conducted online between August 27, 2022 and September 12, 2022. The margin of error is +/- 2.8%.

[Read the full polling memo.](#)

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/women-report-less-satisfaction-challenges-cancer-care>