**‘Email a Cancer Nurse’: A nurse-led service encompassing emotional support with information or advice for people affected by cancer.**

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Background

People affected by cancer often have emotional needs that are intertwined with their need for information. Information and support services offered via telephone have proven to respond well to these needs. However, with the rise of e-communication in health, the need to offer innovative communication channels for cancer information and support has increased.

Aim

To describe Cancer Council Victoria’s (CCV) ‘Email a Cancer Nurse’ service and compare its user profile to CCVs ’13 11 20’ phone service.

Strategy/Tactics

The program delivery framework guiding this specialist nurse practice centres upon a unique ability to provide a compassionate and personalised response underpinned by evidence-based information, through the written medium. A core team of nurses use robust quality assurance mechanisms with therapeutic communication techniques that promote health literacy.

Program/Policy/Campaign Process

Email and phone user data from the first six months of 2014 were examined to compare demographics, contact type and reasons for making contact via both services.

Outcomes

One in 14 incoming enquiries was via email. Family and carers were the most frequent users of the email service (36%) whereas cancer patients were highest users of the phone service (32%). Reason for contact differed: 25% of email enquiries regarded treatment and management, whereas phone calls mostly regarded practical issues (23%). Email users were younger (average age = 47) than phone users (average age = 56). Emotional support was the main reason for enquiry (10% and 17% respectively) in the email and phone services.

Implications

The ‘Email a Cancer Nurse’ service review suggests that email is a useful tool in some user groups for addressing both practical information and emotional support needs. The challenge for cancer information and support services is to continue developing new offerings that complement existing services, and to ensure they are accessible and relevant to today’s consumer.