Navigating cancer: Insights from patient journey mapping

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Introduction: Cancer is an increasing public health problem in South Africa, with breast cancer being the most commonly diagnosed cancer and cervical cancer the leading cause of cancer deaths among women.

Aim: This study aimed to map journeys of breast and cervical cancer patients across the cancer care continuum in South Africa.

Methodology:

Design	Qualitative study Focus group discussions (FGDs) Collective patient journey mapping
Theoretical frameworks	Intersectionality and health equity
Setting	Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Participants	People living with breast and cervical cancer who had completed treatment
Process	Individual maps → Narrative sharing → Collective map
Analysis	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Results

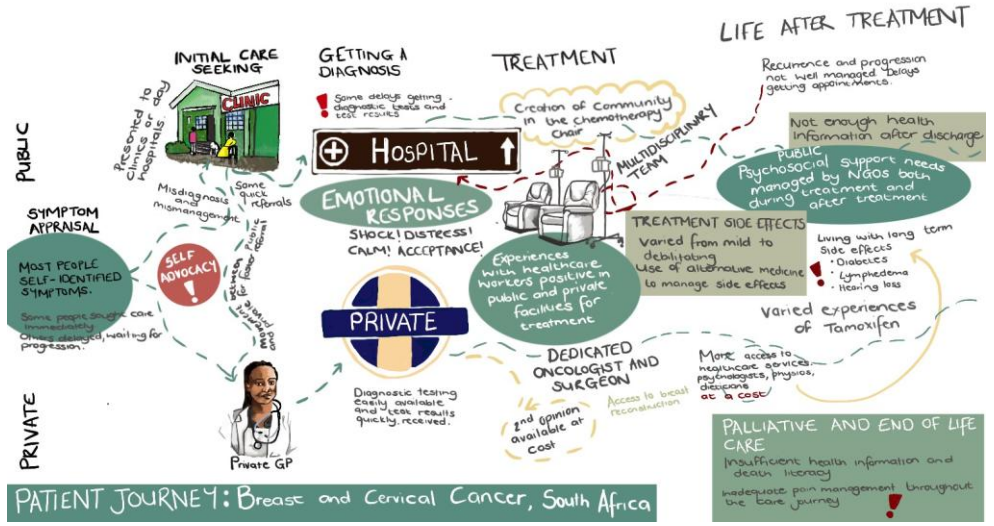
6 FGDS

31 participants

23 breast cancer, 7 cervical cancer, 1 both

1. (DE)PERSONALISED CARE	2. SELF-ADVOCACY	3.INTERSECTING VULNERABILITIES
• Personalised and (de)personalising care • Structural challenges impacted experiences across the care continuum. • Some participants experienced suboptimal care.	Participants actively shape their experience within the healthcare system, which included demanding referrals, seeking second opinions, moving between public and private facilities to prevent delays, and bypassing referral processes.	Cancer experiences intertwined with poverty, gender roles, mental health, comorbidities, and loss.
"I'm not a folder. I'm a person. Speak to me."	"I was also told you can't just walk into the breast clinic… I thought, no, man. I told my husband to drop me at the breast clinic and I walked in…"	"I'm a survivor, because I've never gone to school… I have a lot of illnesses… I lost a child in my marriage. I got divorced after that."

Conclusion: By centring the voices of patients' with breast and cervical cancer, patient journey mapping not only showed where services and systems fall short but also provided guidance for redesigning a more patient responsive health system.



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