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Published In/Presented At

Saake, A., Ray, D., & Chyu, M. (2016, July, 29). *Symptom Burden Prevalence Among Cancer Patients: Survey Creation and Validation*. Poster presented at LVHN Research Scholar Program Poster Session, Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA.

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Symptom Burden Prevalence Among Cancer Patients: Survey Creation and Validation

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INTRODUCTION

Cancer patients commonly experience debilitating treatment-induced symptoms like fatigue, nausea, and pain. It is imperative for providers to treat these symptoms successfully so that the patient's optimum quality of life can be maintained.¹ Research on these symptoms and how to manage them properly is critical so that strategies to minimize patient discomfort can be developed and implemented.

Study Objectives:

- Design a survey that captures the symptom burden of cancer patients who are being actively treated.
- Utilize cognitive interviewing to assess the reliability of survey items.
- Revise items so that the survey is a reliable tool that will be used in future research.

METHODS

Survey Design:

- Patient demographic information is obtained from their Electronic Medical Record.
- The Edmonton Symptom Assessment System evaluates the patient's symptom burden.²
- Items that address healthcare documents, spirituality, and quality of life acquire a broader scope of patient's circumstances.

Survey Validation:

- Cognitive interviews were conducted with 15 Palliative Medicine staff members.
- Revisions were made to reflect their professional feedback and opinions.

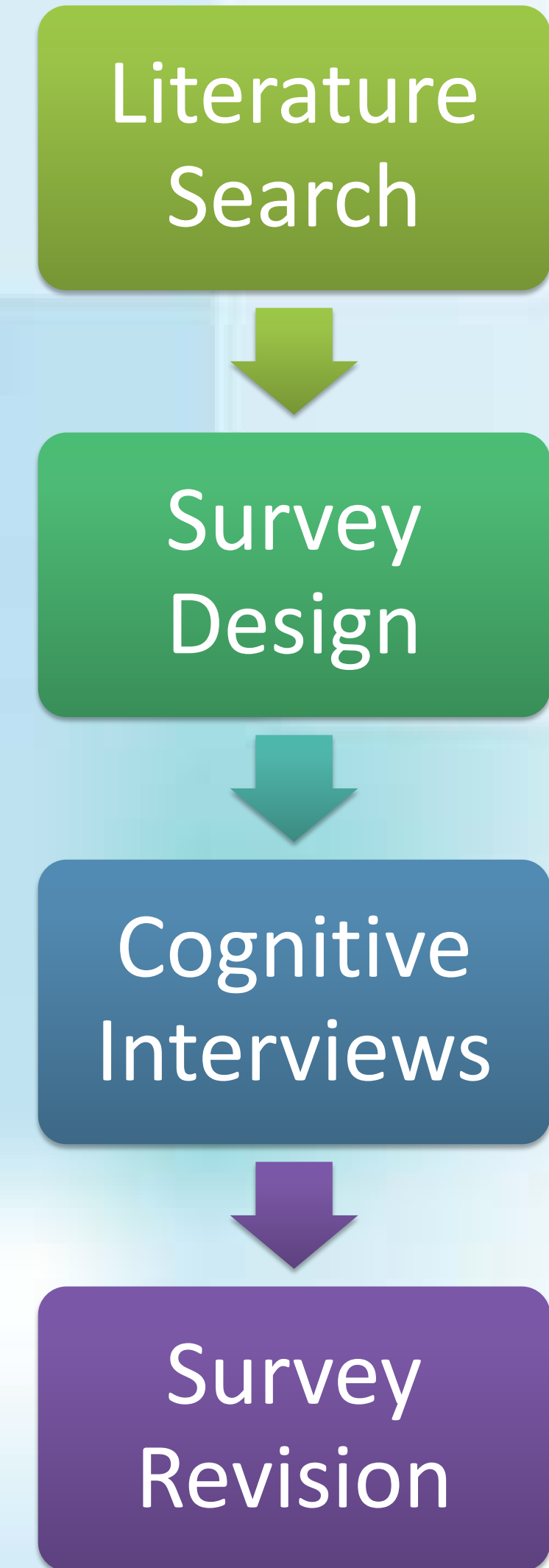


Figure 1: Survey Design and Validation Process.

RESULTS

Original Question	Feedback	Revised Question
1) Do you have an Advance Directive?	-Define Advance Directive -Create an "I don't know" option	Do you have written documentation stating your wishes in the event that you are unable to make medical decisions for yourself? (Examples: living will, advance directive)
4) Please choose the word that most accurately describes how often you have experienced the following symptoms in the past 7 days. -Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always	-Quantify the number of times patient has experienced symptoms	Never Rarely (1-2 times) Sometimes (3-4 times) Often (5-6 times) Always (Everyday)
6) In the past 7 days, how often did you feel that your faith gave you strength to cope with your illness?	-Change "faith" to "spirituality"	In the past 7 days, how often did you feel that spirituality gave you strength to cope with your illness?
7) How would you rate your quality of life during the past 7 days?	-Define quality of life	How would you rate your quality of life during the past 7 days? (Quality of life is defined as the standard of health, comfort and happiness experienced by an individual)

Table 1: Original Vs. Revised Questions.

DISCUSSION

- Using a validated survey is a pivotal part of the research process.
- Conducting research without a reliable tool can compromise the relevancy and accuracy of the collected data.
- Cognitive interviews provided an abundance of beneficial, professional feedback which led to the revision of several items.
- These revisions made the survey more reliable, clear, and consistent.
- Consistency is crucial to ensure that all survey items are interpreted similarly by every participant so that valid data is collected and analyzed.

FUTURE RESEARCH

- The Palliative Medicine Department will be conducting a study using this survey in the coming year.
- The survey will be administered to cancer patients who have been undergoing treatment for at least 3 months at the John and Dorothy Morgan Cancer Center.
- The goal of this research will be to determine which symptoms are most prevalent, and the specific diagnoses that are at risk for a high symptom burden.
- This data will facilitate the development of strategies to manage cancer patient's treatment-induced symptoms more effectively.

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