LGBTQ+ cancer patients: are UK oncologists being supported to develop essential knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to provide quality care?

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Background
Around 1.3 million people in the UK identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning), and there is increasing literature highlighting differing cancer risk factors compared to non-LGBTQ+ patients and persistent inequalities in cancer care. A recent publication revealed that 53.1% of US oncologists were confident in their knowledge of health needs for LGB patients, and only 36.9% for transgender patients1 but such data for European countries is lacking.

Study Aim
To evaluate knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of UK oncology consultants and trainees about LGBTQ+ patients.

Methods
Survey Development
- Literature search
- Patient and public involvement group evaluation (Cancer Research UK)
- UCL Low-risk REC approval
- Emails from UK medical and clinical oncology professional bodies/
- Social media advertising

Recruitment
- Informed consent
- 53-question survey via a secure online platform covering demographics, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours

Outcomes
- There is a deficit in knowledge of UK oncologists of specific cancer care needs of LGBTQ+ patients.
- UK oncologists have a desire to improve care of LGBTQ+ patients through postgraduate training.
- Educational resources developed in accordance with our findings could improve confidence of treating oncologists and LGBTQ+ health inequalities for the population.

Results
258 fully completed responses were received (median age 43 years). 58% had a female and 41% male gender (1% undisclosed). 96% stated their sex-assigned at birth was the same as their gender identity and 14% identified as LGBTQ+. Similar to the general NHS workforce, 25% were black, Asian, or minority ethnicity with 75% white. 65% were consultants and 35% registrars. 42% were medical, and 54% clinical oncologists.

Knowledge – Key findings
- 8% agreed they were confident in their knowledge of specific healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ cancer patients
- 75% felt they would benefit from further education
- 67% felt confident in their ability to communicate effectively with LGBTQ+ patients with cancer

Knowledge of the differing rates of cancer risk factors for the LGBTQ+ population (*compared to the general population) was variable:

Conclusions
- 84% of participants stated they felt comfortable treating LGBTQ+ patients, but concerning, 3% stated they were not comfortable.
- Over half felt that it was important to know a patient’s gender identity to better determine their healthcare needs. But only 29% felt it important to know a person’s sexual orientation.

Behaviours – Key findings
- Consistent with the attitudes findings, there were low rates of routine enquiry about sexual orientation (5%), gender identity (3%) and preferred pronouns (2%).

Statistical analysis (R version 3.6.3)
- Multifactorial ordinal logistic regression and Fisher’s exact test to assess for interactions between demographics and responses
- Holm-Bonferroni method used for multiple testing correction.

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