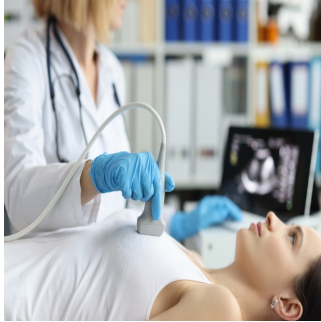


Enhancing Patient-Centred Care in Breast Imaging



Breast cancer remains a significant health concern globally, and its early detection is crucial for improving survival rates. Imaging techniques such as mammography, ultrasound, MRI and biopsy play pivotal roles in early diagnosis. However, the experience of undergoing these procedures often brings apprehension, discomfort and emotional strain to patients, affecting their willingness to attend regular screenings. A patient-centred approach in breast imaging seeks to address these challenges by improving patient experience, reducing anxiety and enhancing communication between healthcare professionals and patients.

Addressing Psychological Impact and Anxiety

The emotional impact of breast imaging procedures cannot be understated. Patients commonly experience stress and anxiety, not only due to the fear of a potential cancer diagnosis but also due to the anticipation of discomfort during the procedure. It is essential to normalise these reactions as typical responses to a stressful situation. Using empathetic language that distinguishes between clinical anxiety and situational worry can help to acknowledge patients' concerns without pathologising them. Overgeneralising emotions as "anxiety" can obscure individual experiences, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach in care, which is rarely effective.

Creating a private and calming environment can significantly alleviate anxiety levels. Facilities should aim to offer private changing rooms, relaxing waiting areas and the option of having a companion present during waiting times. Additionally, clear communication from healthcare providers is critical. Patients who receive clear information about procedures, including what to expect and how to prepare, report lower anxiety levels and higher satisfaction. This communication should be patient-centred and reassuring, answer questions and offer support throughout the imaging process.

Pain Management and Patient Comfort

Physical discomfort is a significant deterrent for many individuals attending breast screening. Mammograms, for instance, involve compressing the breast tissue, which many patients find painful. To address this, the introduction of patient-controlled compression techniques has been shown to reduce pain and increase patient comfort. This approach allows patients to control the degree of compression, thereby decreasing discomfort and fostering a sense of autonomy.

Similarly, using smaller needles during biopsies can make the process more tolerable. Needle size and technique directly impact the discomfort experienced during image-guided procedures. For instance, fine-needle aspirations using smaller gauges can alleviate patient discomfort compared to larger needles used in core biopsies. Additionally, incorporating cushioning pads between the breast and the mammogram machine can help reduce pain by absorbing the force of compression, thereby improving the patient's experience and the quality of imaging results.

Impact of Mindfulness and Music Interventions

Integrating non-pharmacological interventions such as mindfulness and music has shown promising results in enhancing patient comfort during imaging and biopsy procedures. Allowing patients to listen to music of their choice during these procedures can effectively lower anxiety levels and increase feelings of relaxation. Research indicates that music can elevate pain thresholds, enabling patients to endure uncomfortable procedures more easily.

Similarly, mindfulness techniques, including guided imagery, deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation, have proven effective

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in reducing pain perception and alleviating psychological stress. These interventions empower patients to take an active role in managing their anxiety and discomfort. By offering simple and accessible coping mechanisms, healthcare providers can significantly improve the overall patient experience and reduce the psychological burden of breast imaging.

Improving Patient-Provider Interaction and Clinical Environment

The relationship between patients and healthcare providers is critical in shaping the patient experience. Effective communication and a supportive clinical environment are essential components of patient-centred care. Healthcare professionals should strive to build trust by demonstrating genuine interest, showing empathy and providing clear, understandable explanations. Establishing a connection with patients before, during and after the imaging procedure can reduce anxiety and promote a sense of safety and trust.

One effective strategy involves patient education sessions that explain the purpose of each imaging modality, what patients can expect during the procedure and how to interpret results. Educational resources, such as brochures, videos and online materials, should be readily accessible to patients. These resources can help demystify the imaging process and empower patients with knowledge, reducing the fear of the unknown. Follow-up consultations with radiologists to discuss findings and next steps can also help alleviate anxiety and reinforce the importance of regular screenings.

The clinical environment also plays a crucial role in creating a positive patient experience. Simple changes, such as adjusting the décor to include calming colours, artwork and comfortable furnishings, can help create a more welcoming atmosphere. Privacy concerns should be addressed by providing separate changing areas and ensuring that sensitive health information is kept confidential. Healthcare facilities can foster a more patient-friendly atmosphere by addressing these environmental factors.

Optimising patient-centred care in breast imaging is essential for improving the patient experience and encouraging adherence to regular screenings. Addressing psychological distress through empathetic communication, reducing pain perception with innovative techniques and integrating mindfulness and music interventions can significantly enhance patient comfort and satisfaction. A supportive clinical environment and effective patient-provider interactions can further alleviate anxiety and foster trust.

By prioritising these strategies, healthcare providers can create a more compassionate and patient-focused approach to breast imaging. This not only benefits patients by reducing fear and discomfort but also promotes early detection and timely treatment of breast cancer, ultimately leading to better health outcomes.

Source: [Academic Radiology](#)

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