Perceptions of older adults about discussing age-related conditions with their oncologists

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I have a doctor that handles all the other stuff.

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• Secondary analysis of data from cluster RCT of older adults (aged ≥70) with advanced cancer and impairment in ≥1 GA domain who were considering/receiving cancer treatment
  ○ Audio-recorded interviews conducted after initial oncology visit
• Purposefully selected 48 patient transcripts based on Deficit Accumulation Frailty Index scores
• Transcripts analyzed by coders blinded to frailty score
  ○ Open coding Codebook developed, applied to all transcripts Codes compared within and across frailty groups (robust, pre-frail and frail)
• Patient characteristics
  ○ Mean age 76 years
  ○ 56% ≥3 comorbidities, 79% impaired polypharmacy, 90% impaired physical function
Emergent Themes

Patients had minimal recognition of health issues

Oncologists did not ask about age-related issues

Oncologist’s role is limited to cancer

Frail patients had more negative perceptions of oncologist

Representative Quotes

“I don’t really have any other medical issues. Just maybe side-effects off and on with different prescriptions I’ve taken over the years.” [71 yo F]

“She’s my oncologist and has never asked me how wobbly I am.” [78 yo M]

“I have a doctor that handles all the other stuff. Dr. [ ] is treating my cancer.” [80 yo F]

“He’s pleasant, but I’m just not getting all that I feel like I need. I always feel like I’m left hanging and I’m new to this thing called cancer.” [83 yo F]
Conclusions

• Patients in this study did not self-report concerns related to non-cancer issues
  ➢ Did not self-identify health and age-related issues
  ➢ Did not link their age-related conditions with their cancer treatment
  ➢ May not understand the need to address these issues with their oncologist

• This study highlights opportunities for oncologists to engage in discussing health and age-related issues
  ➢ May improve patient communication about non-cancer concerns
  ➢ May improve satisfaction in communication about these issues, particularly in frail patients
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