Implementation of Breast cancer support groups and its potential impact in rural Rwanda
Butaro Cancer Center of Excellence (BCCOE) based breast cancer support groups model

**Presenter**: Albert Ndayisaba, Partners In Health - Rwanda

**Co-authors**: Park PH, Ndayisaba A, Johnston S, Hategekimana V, Mukasakindi H, Kennell-Heiling S, Shulman LN, Gralow J, Pace L

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Background

• Breast cancer is a major public health problem in Rwanda and Sub-Saharan Africa
  – Late stage presentation & lost to follow-up are common challenges
  – Patients face physical, psychological, and socio-economic challenges
  – Lack of knowledge and misinformation about cancer management

• Support groups help participants to
  – Understand the disease
  – Establish stress and coping mechanisms
  – Brainstorm and share locally-relevant socio-economic solutions
  – Understand navigation of the health system
The Butaro Cancer Center of Excellence

- BCCOE was developed in 2012 by MOH in partnership with Partners in Health (PIH) & Dana Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI) as the first national cancer referral facility in rural Rwanda
- At BCCOE, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed and treated
- BCCOE has received 524 breast cancer cases from Rwanda, and 21 cases from outside the country (Burundi, Tanzania & DRC)
Objectives for Support groups

• Create a forum for peer education
  - Raise awareness
  - Breast cancer education
  - Psycho-social counselling
  - Socio-economic support

• Empowerment of participants to
  - Take ownership of their disease
  - Self-management
  - Confident navigation of a complex healthcare system

• Scale-up the model in Rwanda
  - Start in PIH’s 2 other districts
Timeline: 3 Phases of Implementation

• January – April 2016: Planning phase
  - Establish training curriculum and tools
  - Select qualified & interested patient navigators among hospital staff
• May 2016 – April 2017: Train patient navigators and launch of support groups
  - Support groups are held on chemotherapy day every 3 weeks
  - Patient navigators schedule appointments accordingly
• April – June 2017: Program evaluation, analysis, and info sharing
  - Participant survey completed
  - Patient navigators to share experiences & lesson learnt

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Leading support groups

• Breast cancer patient navigator responsibilities
• Stress and coping
• Social support
• Understanding breast cancer disease
• Navigating the health system for breast cancer management

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Preliminary results

• Eight support group meetings taken place thus far
• Average 15 participants per session
  − Attendance rate depends on clinical appointments at BCCOE
• Baseline knowledge test & quality of life survey conducted
• Indicators to measure after 12 months of sessions
  - Knowledge of breast cancer
  - Quality of life
  - Loss to follow-up

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Expected impact

- Foster leadership and peer support among patients
- Breast cancer awareness and provision of psycho-social support
- Improve quality of life
- Increase knowledge of disease and treatment
- Sustain and scale-up the model throughout Rwanda

Picture: Patients learn about breast cancer from a nurse at BCCOE

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