



STORYTELLING AND THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE: NARRATIVES OF BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS

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This research investigates the role storytelling plays in the patient experience of breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, one in eight women will develop invasive breast cancer during her lifetime. Even with increasing efforts and improvements to develop breast cancer treatment, this particular cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women. There are, however, more than 2.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. The current medical world, including that of breast cancer, is one inundated with increasing amounts of technology where medicine becomes a field with fewer face-to-face interactions and more screens as well as test results. The burgeoning field of narrative medicine allows a perspective of the individual rather than the general masses often referred to in the statistics of disease. It bears witness to the human experience of pain and suffering through the individual story.

The overall project involves an analysis of the ritual of storytelling and narrative medicine in the patient-physician relationship; analysis of literature by female writers regarding pain, illness, and death; and the stories of breast cancer survivors in an attempt to give voice to their stories. The interview component of the project involves eight women: three from Utah, one from New Mexico, and four from Sweden. All women are middle-aged breast cancer survivors.

The narrative of these eight stories in conjunction with literary research have been drafted into an Honors English Thesis manuscript in hopes of better understanding how female breast cancer survivors experience their diagnosis and treatment. In addition, it will provide insight to the literary space that women writers have crafted to describe their bodily manifestations of pain and illness.

