Analogical Client Ratings of Cancer Counseling: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Akela L. Bellazetin (Lee Ellington)
College of Nursing, University of Utah

Introduction: Genetic Counseling offers a link between the technologies of testing and the ability of a person to actively participate in a process of meaningful and informed decision making. Communicating risk information during a genetic counseling session is complex. Initial studies have not examined clients' perspectives to the genetic counseling process. The purpose of the present study is to examine the responses of analog clients with a family history of cancer to videotaped cancer genetic counseling sessions. Analog clients rated a national sample of genetic counselors on the effectiveness of their verbal and nonverbal communication.

Procedure: Community participants are asked to view videotaped sessions as if they were the client (analog clients) and provide their impressions of the sessions. Participants complete questionnaires on counselors' verbal and nonverbal communication.

Sample: In the ongoing study we examined a preliminary sample of 52 participants (12 males and 40 females). Their average age was 32.33 years (SD=11.5) and the majority of the sample was Caucasian (80.8%).

Results: Participants were asked to rate counselors on verbal and nonverbal communication on a one to six scale, with one being low and six being high. Participants rated counselors as more effective on eye contact (M=5.2 (1.4)) and less effective with the use of silence and touch (M=3.48 (1.30), M=3.49 (1.63)). On average, participants rated the counselors as moderately effective with the use of verbal communication (Ms=2.96-4.74).

Discussion: According to our sample the genetic counseling profession has room for improvement in the manner in which they convey genetic risk information. Final results from the ongoing study are likely to provide specific insights which will be helpful for the profession and the clients it serves.