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# *SEX: THE SECRET SIDE OF CANCER*

# SECRET SIDES OF CANCER

- Financial implications
- Mental health challenges
- Role reversal
- Intimacy and sexual health

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- Why are we talking about intimacy and sex?



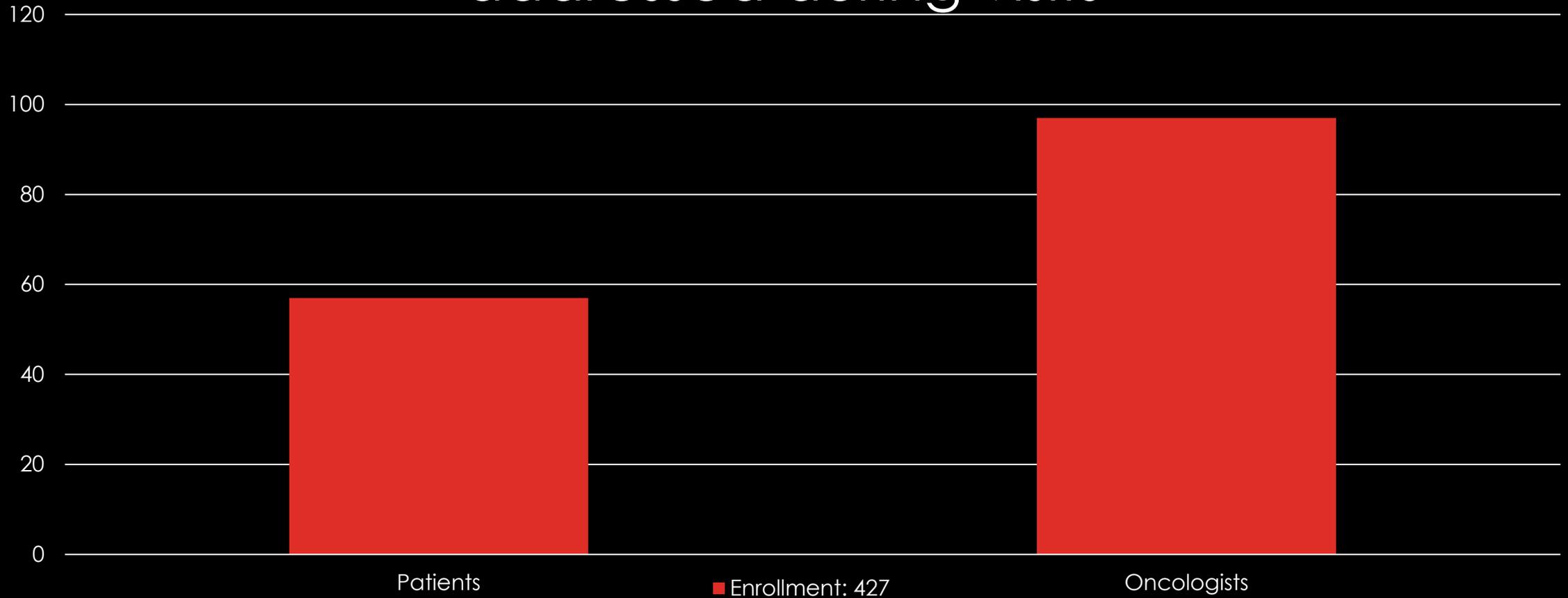
- **Quality of life**

- **70% of patients with cancer experience sexual dysfunction**

- **Sex and intimacy are part of a healthy relationship**

- **Some studies have suggested that intimacy and sexuality may help recovery from cancer treatment**

# Perception on sexual health being addressed during visits



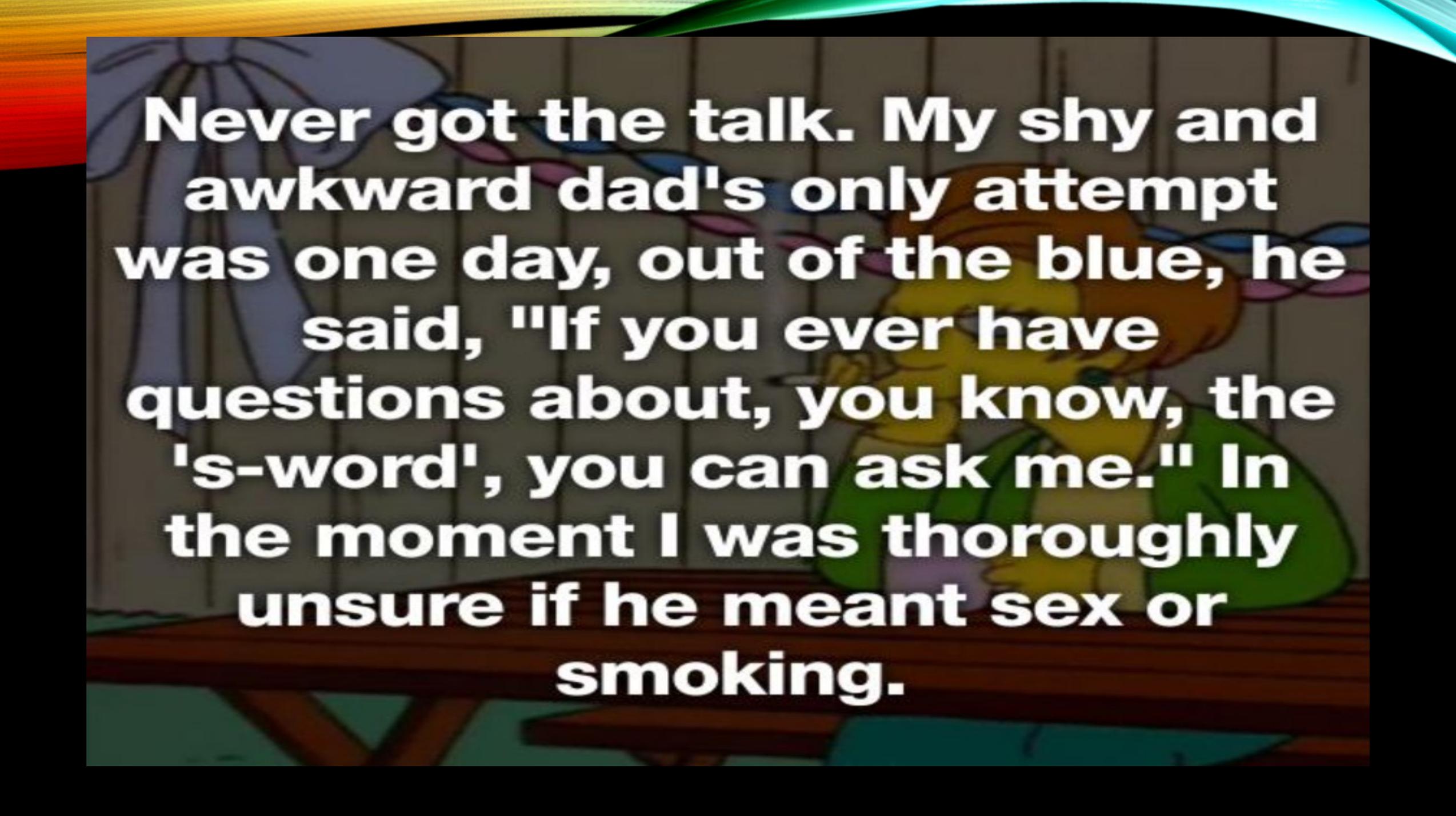
# WHY THE DISCONNECT?

- Disconnect is likely due to differing views between care providers and patients about what warrants dialog. This apparent disconnect may be due in part to the recall bias inherent to surveys <sup>(1)</sup>
- Oncologists were more likely to address if the patient was already in a relationship
- Younger patients had more sexual health assessments <sup>(2)</sup>

# REASONS SEXUALITY IS UNDERASSESSED?

- Lack of training
- Embarrassment
- Ignorance about this issue
- Lack of prioritization
- Lack of resources
- Cultural differences
- Generational differences

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- ***“Most of today’s adults didn't grow up in households that were comfortable talking about sex, so we don't have an internal template for how to do it” –Jill Whitney, marriage and family therapist***



**Never got the talk. My shy and awkward dad's only attempt was one day, out of the blue, he said, "If you ever have questions about, you know, the 's-word', you can ask me." In the moment I was thoroughly unsure if he meant sex or smoking.**

# American Society of Clinical Oncology, 2018

- **It is recommended that there be a discussion with the patient, initiated by a member of the health care team, regarding sexual health and dysfunction resulting from cancer or its treatment. Psychosocial and/or psychosexual counseling should be offered to all patients with cancer, aiming to improve sexual response, body image, intimacy and relationship issues, and overall sexual functioning and satisfaction**

# IS SEXUAL ACTIVITY SAFE FOR YOU

- Confirm with your oncology team
- Factors to consider
  - Blood counts
  - Chemotherapy administration
  - Types of sexual activity to avoid
  - Mobility
  - Central lines
  - Fatigue

Sexual activity is not limited by having a central line\*

# COMMUNICATION IS KEY

- Talk to your care team, even if they neglect to bring these concerns up
- *“I have a personal question I need to ask...” or “I understand that this can affect my body in many ways. Will it affect my sex life?”* –National Institute of Aging, 2021

Let's enjoy some  
awkward  
conversation soon.



# SEXUAL SIDE EFFECTS RELATED TO CANCER TREATMENT

## Physical

- Hormone imbalances
- Vaginal dryness
- Erectile dysfunction
- Neurological changes
- Painful intercourse
- Fatigue
- Medications

## Psychological

- More pressing concerns
- Fatigue
- Decreased libido
- Body image concerns
- Anxiety/depression
- Partners concern
- Patient/caregiver relationship

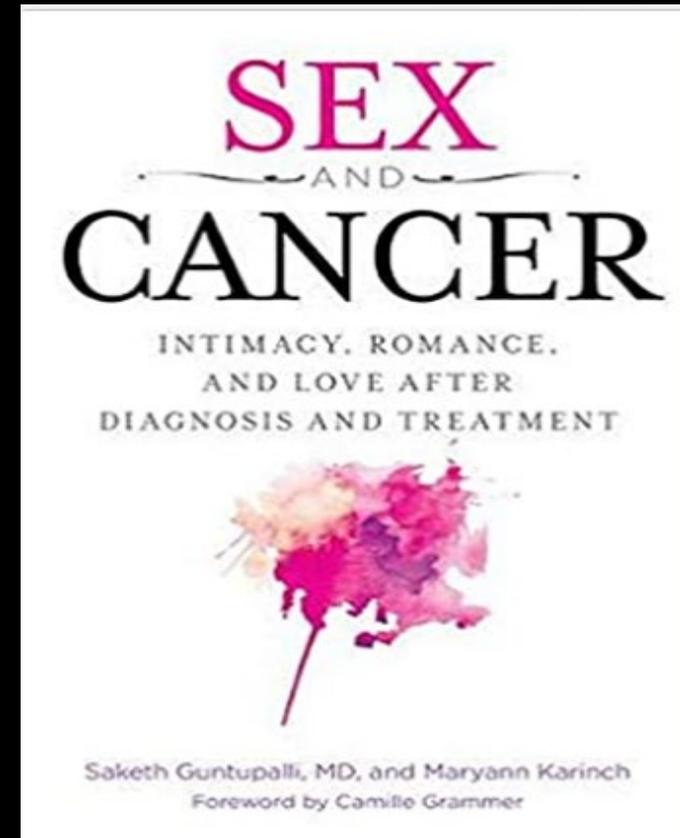
# IMPROVING SEXUAL HEALTH

- Be patient with yourself
- Positive self body talk
- Talk to your partner
- Physical proximity
- Be creative
- Topical creams or lubricants
- Other sexual intimacy products
- Hormone replacement
- Medications if appropriate



# RESOURCES

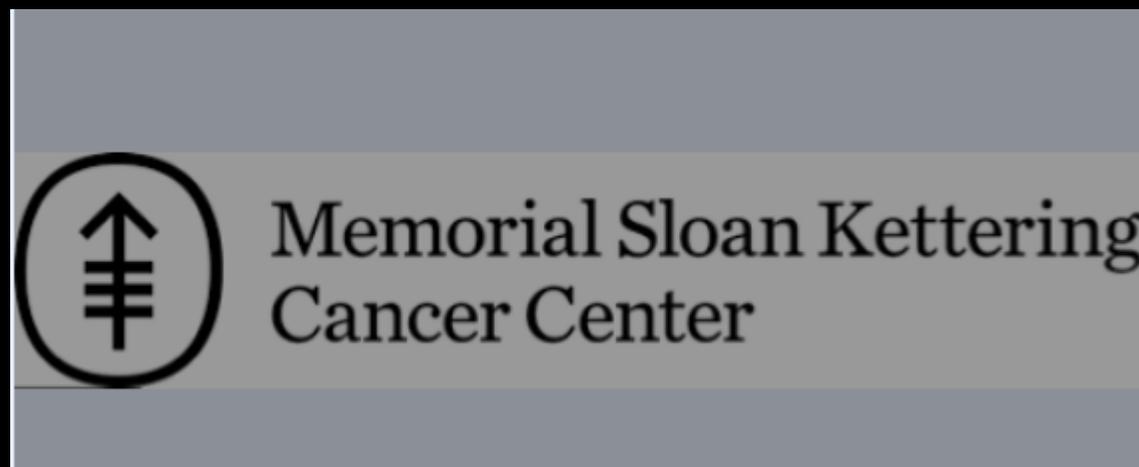
- Medical team
- AA/MDS foundation
- MDS foundation
- American Cancer Society
- National Cancer Institute
- Be the Match
- American Sexual Health Association
- Books and Memoirs
- Stores tailored for cancer patients



# SURVIVORSHIP CLINICS

- Prevent, manage and treat long-term effects of treatment and consider options
- Often work in conjunction with home MD's
- Provide services that help cancer survivors live well after treatment

# SURVIVORSHIP CLINICS





QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

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# REFERENCES

- Discussions about reproductive and sexual health among young adult survivors of cancer. Wang, Y., Chen, L., Ruan, J., & Cheung, W. *Cancer Med.* 5(6). 2017.
- Discussing Sexual Health in the Medical Oncologist's Practice: Exploring Current Practice and Challenges. Krowel, E., Albers, L., Nicolai, M., Putter, H., Osanto, S., Pelger, R., & Elzevier, H. *Journal of Cancer Education.* 35(6) 2020.