Quality of Life and Cultural Influences: A Comparison Study of Chinese Women Diagnosed with Breast Cancer

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Chinese Hospital, Chinese Community Health Care Association, and Chinese Community Health Plan

**Introduction**

**Background:**
- Chinese Americans are the largest group of Asian Americans in the U.S., representing 19.6% of the population in San Francisco (Census 2000).
- Among Chinese American women in California, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer (American Cancer Society California Cancer Facts & Figures, 2003).
- Foreign-born Chinese women may differ from American-born Chinese women in their cultural perceptions about breast cancer. Few studies have investigated quality of life (QOL) among Chinese women with breast cancer, or compared foreign-born to American-born Chinese women with breast cancer.
- Very few studies have investigated quality of life (QOL) of Chinese American women with breast cancer, or compared foreign-born to American-born Chinese women with breast cancer.

**Specific Aims:**
1. To investigate the experiences of Chinese American women with breast cancer.
2. To understand how women of these groups define quality of life.
3. To compare how national origin and immigration experience affect quality of life among these two groups.
4. To understand how the experience of breast cancer change these women's perspectives about quality of life.
5. To understand how these women deal with advance directives.

**Methods:**
- Qualitative face-to-face, one-to-one interviews with 15 Chinese immigrants and 15 American-born Chinese adult women with breast cancer recruited in San Francisco from oncology practices, support groups, health-related web sites, social networks, newspapers, or in response to flyers.
- Data Analysis:
  1. Audio taped interviews transcribed in original language.
  2. Both investigators reviewed transcripts independently.
  3. Pre- and post-analytical memos and conferences on data analysis.
  4. Analysis of primary data.

**Preliminary Analysis of Themes (N=10)**

**Defining Quality of Life (QOL):**
- Both groups of women tend to include family relationships and family support when describing good QOL.
- More foreign-born Chinese include wealth as an important dimension of QOL.
- More women consider QOL to be a function of better care of themselves.
- Both groups of women seem to have a similar definition of QOL.

**Beliefs about Cancer:**
- Both groups of women include self-identity and the meaning of a breast cancer diagnosis, roles of faith, spirituality, fate and fatalism.
- Foreign-born: Chinese women see the words as independence and freedom from disease; QOL is defined by a sense of health, wellbeing, and enjoyment of life.
- American-born: Chinese experience cancer as a terminal illness. They also see QOL as having quality time with family and friends, and the ability to enjoy life.

**Pain Control:**
- Foreign-born Chinese women all expressed great difficulty in adjusting and adapting to life in the U.S., such that their quality of life before being diagnosed with breast cancer was already very poor. Many of these women use breast cancer as another traumatic event that compounded their difficulties.
- "Once in the U.S., the first thing is to survive, not to enjoy life."

**Background:**
- Chinese Hospital of San Francisco
- Chinese Community Health Care Association
- Chinese Community Health Plan

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**Defining Quality of Life (QOL):**
- Both groups of women tend to include family relationships and family support when describing good QOL.
- More foreign-born Chinese include wealth as an important dimension of QOL.
- "I felt that money was very important... With money, I could almost get anything done."
- "American-born Chinese see the words as independence and freedom from disease; QOL is defined by health, wellbeing, and enjoyment of life.
- Foreign-born: Chinese women see the words as independence and freedom from disease; QOL is defined by a sense of health, wellbeing, and enjoyment of life.
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**Pain Control:**
- "I lost my hair; I could not hide [the fact that I had cancer] anymore. My landlady got scared and asked me to move out saying, 'you should go to a nursing home, you should not live inside this house.'"
- Foreign-born: Chinese women all expressed great difficulty in adjusting and adapting to life in the U.S., such that their quality of life before being diagnosed with breast cancer was already very poor. Many of these women use breast cancer as another traumatic event that compounded their difficulties.
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**Conclusions:**
- Analyze preliminary data to suggest that there are important differences between American-born and foreign-born Chinese women in their beliefs about, perceptions of, and experiences with breast cancer. These beliefs, perceptions, and experiences may have important implications for cancer support services and survivorship. Foreign-born Chinese women describe their breast cancer diagnosis as a wake-up call, to remind them to take better care of themselves.

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