

# **Diagnoses Across Borders: Experiences Communicating Cancer Diagnoses Amongst U.S. Latino Transnational Families**

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Many individuals living in the United States (U.S.) have first-degree relatives who reside in different countries. Discussing substantial medical information, such as a cancer diagnosis, with geographically-distanced relatives can pose a unique array of considerations, obstacles, and intricacies. Past research that has explored family communication of health information has thus far neglected to examine, in-depth, the experiences of transnational families. Such experiences are worth consideration from genetic counselors, who share information that may have health implications for patients' families. This qualitative study explored the communication of cancer diagnoses between individuals diagnosed with cancer in the U.S. and their first-degree relatives living in Latin America (countries in Central America, South America, or the Caribbean). Five semi-structured interviews were carried out with members of the Spanish-speaking cancer support group at Boston Medical Center who had been diagnosed with cancer within the past five years and who had at least one first-degree relative living in Latin America. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilized. Interviews were carried out in Spanish and/or English, transcribed verbatim, translated, and coded for major themes. Major themes that emerged were the roles of the (1) patient as the protector, (2) patient as a cultural broker, and (3) patient as a self-navigator. Implications for genetic counselors include the need to assess the emotional response of patients to a major health diagnosis; assess the emotional response patients expect their relatives to have; inquire about any particular message or tone a patient hopes to convey to their relatives; help a patient embody that particular message or tone (via role plays or referrals); and inform patients of local support groups. Future studies should explore these issues within a larger sample and may also focus on the discussion of genetic information within transnational families to determine if similar themes emerge.