

Background

Screening tests can sometimes detect abnormal cells that may never turn into cancer. Improved communication may reduce anxiety and enhance quality of life among people diagnosed with low-risk lesions.

Research Included

- 34 studies published from 2008 to 2023
- 21 studies focused on **breast** lesions
- 2 studies focused on **cervix** lesions
- 7 studies focused on **thyroid** lesions
- 4 studies focused on **prostate** lesions
- 17 studies involved **patients**
- 5 studies involved **physicians**

Methods

To identify ideal labels, language and other strategies to improve communication about low-risk lesions, we:

1. Reviewed prior research of patient or clinician views on how to improve communication about low-risk lesions
2. Interviewed patients who had low-risk lesions (bladder, breast, cervix, prostate) and physicians who treat them.

Interview Participants

Low-risk lesion discussed	Participant Type	
	Patients (n=27)	Physicians (n=28)
Bladder	6	3
Breast	12	15
Cervix	4	7
Prostate	5	3

Results

Rationale for Preferred Labels

	Abnormal (abnormal cells)	Precursor (stage 0, precancer)	Cancer (low-risk, low-grade)
PROS	<p>Patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to understand • Alleviates anxiety <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to understand • Alleviates anxiety 	<p>Patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-explanatory <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiates condition from cancer • Ensures patients attend follow-up 	<p>Patients:</p> <p>---</p> <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures patients attend follow-up • Language doctor was trained to use
CONS	<p>Patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not clarify risk of cancer <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too vague • Requires explanation 	<p>Patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too complex • Causes anxiety • Perceive advanced cancer <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes anxiety 	<p>Patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too complex • Causes anxiety • Perceive advanced cancer <p>Physicians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too complex

Recommended Communication Strategies

LANGUAGE

- Physicians should refer to abnormal cells
- Use plain language and analogies
- State low-risk lesions are different from invasive cancer
- Describe risk of becoming invasive or recurring
- Explain why treatment is needed

OTHER

- Show visual aids (pictures, videos, models)
- Provide take home material
- Offer longer appointments
- Schedule follow-up visits
- Connect patients with support services and groups
- Use translators for those with low literacy