Introduction

- Older adults with advanced hematologic malignancies often have a poor understanding of their disease and prognosis.
- Knowledge of how patients’ social networks inform and influence their decisions may guide interventions to improve their disease understanding and prognostic awareness.

Objective: To explore how social networks influence patients’ decision-making and disease understanding.

Methods

Study sample

- N = 9 patients with incurable advanced hematologic malignancies (myeloid malignancies and multiple myeloma) diagnosed in the preceding six months
- \( M_{\text{age}} = 77.7 \) years (range: 66-91)
- 44% female, 56% single, 44% lived alone
- 44% and 33% screened positive for depression and cognitive impairment, respectively

Procedures

- Patients completed a geriatric assessment, a social network map, and demographics.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcribed.
- Four independent coders analyzed the transcripts using constant comparison method.

Results

We identified three key themes:

1. Structure of social networks varied in size (range: 7-18 contacts)
   - Examples:

2. Patient-oncologist communication was lacking
   - Patients often provided vague descriptions of their diagnoses
   - Patients were not aware of approximate survival nor did they ask their oncologist

3. Patients utilized their individual social contacts differently
   - Patients selectively shared and received disease-related information
   - Patients withheld information from distant contacts and from those they did not wish to burden

Conclusion

- Larger studies are needed to understand how social networks influence patients’ decision-making and disease understanding in order to guide intervention development and improve communication.