

## Summer Student Research Program

### Project Description

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**PROJECT TITLE (200 Characters max):**

*The Hope Library: Storytelling as Psychosocial Support for Cancer Patients.*

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

We hypothesize that through storytelling, patients will experience improvement in self-reported anxiety, reductions in feelings of isolation, and establish a new sense of identity and control over their cancer journey.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION (Include design, methodology, data collection, techniques, data analysis to be employed and evaluation and interpretation methodology)**

#### **Purpose:**

This project aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a video library featuring personal stories from patients, caregivers, and providers at University Hospital's Cancer Institute of New Jersey. The Hope Library serves as a resource for individuals to share experiences related to cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery, addressing the growing need for emotional support and cancer education. This study will assess the library's impact on patient and caregiver well-being, as well as its role in enhancing medical student education.

#### **Design:**

The Hope Library is being constructed from recorded oral histories of patients who have undergone cancer treatment, as well as their caregivers and healthcare providers. These stories are collected through guided conversations, where participants have the opportunity to share their experiences in a reflective and supportive setting. Students play an active role in this process, helping to facilitate discussions and ensuring that each storyteller's perspective is captured in a way that is both meaningful and authentic. At the end of each storytelling session, students will administer a survey to the storyteller.

Once recorded and edited by the students, these stories are stored in a digital archive and made accessible on tablets within the cancer center. At the end of each video, viewers will have the option to complete a satisfaction questionnaire and provide feedback.

**Data Collection:** Surveys are administered at the Cancer Center at University Hospital in private spaces. Storytellers will complete the Hope Library surveys. Students who aid in the recording of the videos are also asked to complete surveys regarding their opinions on storytelling, comfort engaging in difficult conversations, desire to empower patients with psychosocial support, and their experiences talking with patients. All library viewers are given an opportunity to indicate their satisfaction with the library and provide feedback. Surveys take no more than five minutes. The length of time for the viewing of the video will depend on the video length.

**Data Analysis:** Data analysis will be quantitative and qualitative. We will tabulate the number of patients, caregivers, and providers that participated in the project and their answers to the Likert scale surveys. Their comments will be analyzed qualitatively.

**SPONSOR'S MOST RECENT PUBLICATIONS RELEVANT TO THIS RESEARCH:**

**Publications and Presentations (see appendix)**

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1. Blanchard, IN, Korst, MR, Hornyak, JN, Hossain, R, Yang, AH, Shah, RR, Carrillo, GS, Pories, SE. ***Role of the healthcare team in psychosocial support for oncology patients: a thematic analysis of patient and survivor interviews.*** Presented at ASCO Student and Resident Forum, Chicago, IL. May 2025 (Poster in appendix)
2. Ramirez, E, Lee, M: ***The Hope Library: Thematic Analysis of Spanish-Speaking Patients with Cancer.*** Presented at NJMS Dean's Office of Research 2025 Summer Student Research Program Student Presentations.
3. Yang, AH, Korst, MR, Hornyak, JN, Blanchard, IN, Hossain, R, Shah, RR, Carrillo, GS, Pories, SE. ***The Hope Library: Increasing Medical Student Empathy and Understanding for Cancer Patients in an Urban Community Through Narrative Medicine.*** (In preparation)
4. Blanchard, IN, Yang, AH, Hossain, R, Lee, M, Ramirez, E, Herrera, B, Amin, Maryam, Korst, MR, Hornyak, JN, , Shah, RR, Carrillo, GS, Chen, P-H, Pories, SE. ***Digital Patient Narratives as a Tool for Healing and Connection among Cancer Patients and Survivors: A Pilot Study at One Urban Safety-net Cancer Center.*** (Manuscript in Preparation for Submission for Publication)
5. Korst, MR, Hornyak, JN, Blanchard, IN, Hossain, R, Yang, AH, Shah, RR, Carrillo, GS, Chen, P-H, Pories, SE. ***Thematic analysis of personal narratives of cancer patients treated in a safety net hospital: a pilot study*** . (Manuscript in Preparation for Submission for Publication)
6. Ramirez, E, Lee, M: ***The Hope Library: Thematic Analysis of Spanish-Speaking Patients with Cancer.*** Selected for oral presentation at the SNMA Regional Medical Education conference, which will be held Saturday, February 28, 2026, at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School.

THIS PROJECT IS:     Clinical     Laboratory     Behavioral     Other

THIS PROJECT IS CANCER-RELATED

Please explain Cancer relevance

The need for greater support among patients with cancer is well-documented, particularly among minorities and low-income individuals who face higher levels of distress. University Hospital (UH) in Newark, NJ, which serves the largest number of charity care cases in the state, reflects these disparities. The surrounding community experiences a poverty rate twice the national average (27.4% vs. 13.8%), an uninsured rate of 19.1%, and the highest number of individuals experiencing homelessness in New Jersey. Chronic illness disproportionately affects this population, and cancer, in particular, is a significant source of psychological distress.

University Hospital's 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, which gathered input from over 1,100 Newark residents, stakeholders, and leaders, identified a critical need for better support in navigating healthcare and social services. Many individuals described fears about opening up to providers and feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and stigma following a diagnosis.

The link between emotional distress and poorer cancer outcomes is well established. In 1997, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) proposed distress as the sixth vital sign in cancer care, yet rates of distress among patients remain as high as 35-70%. Storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool to help patients cope, with participants reporting increased hope and reduced anxiety. By sharing their experiences, individuals can shift their illness narrative from an isolating personal burden to a shared, collective experience—one that fosters learning, connection, and support.

Recognizing the urgent need for enhanced psychosocial support at the Cancer Institute of New Jersey at University Hospital, we developed The Hope Library, a video archive of oral histories from cancer survivors, caregivers, and providers. This library will be available to patients at all stages of their cancer journey, offering a source of shared experience and emotional support. Surveys will assess its effectiveness in addressing the psychosocial needs of patients in a community with limited access to such resources.

THIS PROJECT IS HEART, LUNG & BLOOD- RELATED

Please explain Heart, Lung, Blood relevance

## Summer Student Research Program Project Description

**THIS PROJECT INVOLVE RADIOISOTOPES?**

**THIS PROJECT INVOLVES THE USE OF ANIMALS**   
PENDING  APPROVED  IACUC PROTOCOL #

**THIS PROJECT INVOLVES THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS?**   
PENDING  APPROVED  IRB PROTOCOL # 2024000541

**THIS PROJECT IS SUITABLE FOR:**

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS  ENTERING FRESHMAN   
SOPHMORES  ALL STUDENTS

**THIS PROJECT IS WORK-STUDY:** Yes  or No

**THIS PROJECT WILL BE POSTED DURING ACADEMIC YEAR  
FOR INTERESTED VOLUNTEERS:** Yes  or No

**WHAT WILL THE STUDENT LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?**

Participating in The Hope Library offers NJMS students a unique opportunity to explore the power of narrative in medicine. While preclinical training emphasizes efficient patient interviews—focusing on extracting relevant details and streamlining information—students rarely receive formal guidance on how to truly listen with rather than to a patient. Through conducting interviews, students become active participants in each patient’s story, strengthening their ability to practice patient-centered care. This experience fosters key skills, including compassionate listening, engaging in difficult conversations, and understanding the burdens of chronic illness. Students will learn to listen attentively, interpret and reflect on what they hear, and respond with greater emotional awareness. They will gain a deeper appreciation for social determinants of health and develop confidence in navigating conversations that help patients make sense of disruptive experiences.

Beyond clinical skills, The Hope Library also offers students exposure to research on the intersection of storytelling and medicine. By contributing to a growing archive of patient experiences, students engage with qualitative research methods and explore the role of narrative in shaping health outcomes. This experience encourages critical thinking about how personal stories can inform broader discussions on healthcare disparities, patient autonomy, and medical decision-making. The Hope Library serves as early exposure to the personal dimensions of cancer care, offering insight into how a patient’s story extends beyond their diagnosis. Previous students have described a newfound appreciation for narrative medicine, recognizing how storytelling grants patients autonomy in shaping their own experiences. Ultimately, The Hope Library reinforces the idea that patients are more than their pathologies, preparing students to provide humanistic, empathetic care.