

As an aspiring doctor, I often reflect on the importance of the relationship between physicians and their patients. Positive relationships are vital to trust, compliance, and ultimately, treatment success. A physician's role of treating patients includes being a teacher, listener, advocate, and counselor. Best practices in patient-centered care reflect this notion.

With this understanding, I sought to create a tool to aid oncology care teams with actively engaging patients and caregivers in disease education. I researched and designed *Cancer Comics* with the vital intersection of the humanities and medicine in mind, teaching medical concepts while recognizing personal aspects of treatment that are often left out in other medical education tools. My patient experience-centered graphic medical education tool can be used as a complement to currently available media with the benefit of being provided by the care team in-clinic. It provides a controlled and trusted list of resources, encourages discussion with health care providers, and empowers patients and caregivers to take an active role in treatment.

In the Research and Creative Honors Program, I created an interdisciplinary committee to advise me on critical aspects of the project: medicine, psychology, health literacy, children's literature, graphic medicine/comics, and medical humanities. Before starting my first book, I conducted a literature review of common pediatric oncology treatment protocols on AccessHemOnc and AccessPediatrics, the psychological impacts of cancer treatment on PubMed, and narrative medicine on Wiley Online Library. Once I began writing the comic itself, I solicited feedback from former caregivers. Through that process, I learned the importance of providing clarifying language—such as explaining that leukemia is a type of cancer—to young patients. It was an aspect of health literacy and patient education that wasn't obvious to me in my literature review or science background.

As a biochemistry major, I didn't have an in-depth introduction to aspects of patient experiences that I ultimately address in the project. Through my research process, I discovered a body of literature on toxic positivity. I read scholarship by authors such as Judy Segal on how the imperative to stay positive actually works to silence people from giving voice to the difficulties of the cancer experience. On page 8, for example, I originally included the statement "stay positive," but after my research experience, I changed the phrase to "share how you are feeling" and illustrated icons of positive and negative emotions to provide a productive message for patients.

Kathryn (Katie) Houk and Amanda Melilli with the UNLV Libraries were instrumental in introducing me to both graphic illness narratives and children's literature that very directly shaped my work. My own research has not revealed other comics used in pediatric oncology education, though several conversations and email correspondence later, Katie led me to other educational comics in other specialties, such as pediatric pulmonology and endocrinology, that served as examples of successful graphic medical education. My inclusion of the Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT) and using the Flesch-Kincaid reading scale came from her guidance, and allows for an easier transition into clinical evaluation. Through my correspondence with UNLV resources and subject matter experts, I learned about online tools such as the Health Literacy for Interprofessional Education (IPE) eToolkit and performed searches based on key terms and phrases to conduct more effective research.

I was unsure of how clinical surveys were conducted in the context of what I envisioned, so Katie encouraged me to contact one of the founders of graphic medicine at Penn State College of Medicine for further input. Dr. Michael Green helped me structure my plan for clinical evaluation and provided additional sources that I will reference in the later stages of my project.

His expertise along with the clinical research expertise of my advisor created a foundation for clinical evaluation that made me confident in the project's structure.

My experience writing and illustrating a scientifically-grounded creative work has been a departure from my experience conducting benchtop chemistry research. It shaped how I view research, collaboration, and scholarship as a whole. I have been continuing this project since the fulfilment of my thesis, and am determined to see it come to fruition. *Cancer Comics* will continue to grow as I do, and I'm excited to experience the transformation.