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A nurse-led group intervention

By Lisa Sheeran, Dr Anouk Tremblay, Maria Franou, Professor Sanchia Aranda, Dr Penny Schofield and Associate Professor Kelly-Anne Phillips

The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre is researching cancer-related menopausal symptoms to determine appropriate nurse-led interventions for breast cancer survivors.

Hot flushes (HF) are a frequent, bothersome and often severe symptom of menopause but for breast cancer survivors they can be more frequent, severe and distressing.

Anecdotally, nurses often feel frustrated at being unable to alleviate their patients’ HF and although pharmacological interventions are helpful (Loprinzi et al 2000), many breast cancer survivors are unwilling to take further medication because of documented side-effects. There is some evidence to suggest that cognitive-behavioural interventions and relaxation are useful in alleviating HF in breast cancer survivors (Ganz et al 2000; Fenlon 2007) and nurses can be integral in facilitating such interventions.

The first phase of the study involved a pilot project to test an intervention approach based on existing evidence. The pilot recruited 24 breast cancer survivors experiencing at least five or more hot flushes a day to a group intervention led by a clinical research nurse and a clinical psychologist. The intervention consisted of providing evidence-based information, cognitive-behavioural strategies and relaxation. A total of six groups with between three and six participants attended the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre for four sessions of one and a half hours duration, one week apart. All the women were encouraged to practice the techniques and strategies discussed at each session.

Initial feedback from semi-structured telephone interviews post intervention demonstrated the acceptability of the intervention for participants, with overall positive comments about the intervention elements and the combined nurse/psychologist facilitation. Positive aspects of the intervention included the opportunity for women to discuss their symptoms, feel listened to and realise that something could be done rather than just ‘putting up with HF’.

Despite being acceptable to women there were some issues in the feasibility of delivering this intervention face-to-face. These included: the distance women live from the treatment centre, time availability due to work or child care commitments and the amount of professional time taken in recruiting to groups. These issues will be explored further in forthcoming publications.

Outcomes analysis of the intervention will be conducted in October 2007.

References

All authors are based at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Professor Sanchia Aranda is also head of the School of Nursing, University of Melbourne. Dr Anouk Tremblay was a visiting medical oncology fellow from Montreal at the time of this study and is currently at the Centre Hospitalier Regional de Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, Canada.

Exploring women’s experiences of STIs

By Leah East and Debra Jackson

Leah East is a PhD student from the University of Western Sydney and her candidature is focused on exploring women’s experiences of having a sexually transmitted infection (STI) from a feminist perspective.

Within Australia and worldwide, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) continue to increase with women and young people being particularly vulnerable to these infections. Despite a vast array of safer sex campaigns it seems the messages are not getting through considering the increasing incidence of STIs.

The existing literature reveals a number of issues that hinder the practice of safer sex and consequently contribute to a rise in STIs. These include the concept of romantic love influencing condom use within sexual relations, women’s inability to initiate and negotiate condom use due to typical gender and societal norms and the general perception of feeling invulnerable to STI acquisition (East et al 2007). A current research project aims to provide insights into women’s lives and experiences with having an STI that will contribute to the understanding of these experiences in order to guide therapeutic care and support. The project has implications for the nursing profession, particularly sexual health nursing, and other health professionals working in the area. It also has the potential to guide educational and safer sex campaigns through understanding and gaining insight into why some young women are not practicing safer sex.

For further information about this study please contact Leah East: (ls.east@student.uws.edu.au).

References
Leah East is a PhD candidate in the School of Nursing at the University of Western Sydney. Professor Debra Jackson is based at NFORCE Research Group also within the School of Nursing at the University of Western Sydney.

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