

A critical consideration of a distraction-based self-help intervention to help individuals cope with living with a diagnosis of cancer.

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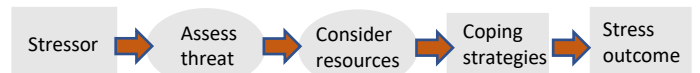
Background

- Approximately 367,000 new cases of cancer are recorded in the UK every year (Cancer Research UK, 2021).
- A diagnosis of cancer can have a **significant impact on emotional and psychological wellbeing**.
- Psychosocial interventions have shown to be effective for improving individuals ability to cope with stress, anxiety, depression and other psychosocial disturbances. Evidence for this can be found throughout literature.

(Matcham et al., 2014).

Theory-based intervention

- A written, distraction-based leaflet was developed (Phelps et al., 2005) to support individuals' during the waiting period when going through genetic risk assessment.
- '**Getting through the waiting period**' - Designed to encourage individuals to engage with internal and external distraction techniques to gain more control over their thoughts during times of worry and uncertainty (Phelps et al, 2005).
- Based on the **Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping** (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).



Lazarus & Folkman, 1984.

Development & Evaluation of a written, distraction-based intervention

Phase I – Focus group study

- Participants - 15 women recently referred for genetic risk assessment for breast/ovarian cancer.

Focus group 1

- Psychological responses to referrals were discussed.

Participants were provided with the potential intervention to use.

Focus group 2

- Potential role and effectiveness of the intervention for minimising stress was discussed.

Key findings

- ✓ Positive response.
- ✓ Participants considered the leaflet to be appropriate and potentially effective.
- Small number of participants experienced an increase in intrusive thoughts after focus groups - individual differences.
- *'It did make me wonder whether I should be worrying more.'*

Readers are encouraged to set aside time to think about their worries to ensure important issues are processed (Phelps et al. 2005; Wegner, 1994).

(Phelps et al., 2005).

Phase II

Randomised controlled trial

- 162 participants.
- Postal questionnaires completed upon entry of a genetic testing programme and again 1 month later.
- Participants either received the coping leaflet and standard information or standard information.

Key findings

- ✓ Participants with high baseline stress who received the intervention reported a significant reduction in distress.
- ✓ No adverse effects reported.
- ✓ Evidence to suggest a distraction based intervention may be successful in reducing stress during times of uncertainty and worry. (Bennett et al., 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Phelps et al., 2013).

(Bennett et al., 2007).

Impact

Goodness of fit - (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Phase III

- Randomised trial to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Phelps et al. 2013)
- Levels of distress reduced in those experiencing moderate distress.
- Participants receiving the intervention were found to be less likely to drop out of the genetic testing risk assessment.
- No adverse effects.

Target population

- Individuals experiencing distress during times of uncertainty across a range of different settings (Phelps et al., 2013).
- ✓ Active distraction is suggested as a tool to support individuals in the short term – not encouraged for long term use or to avoid processing important information or concerns.

Further research

Informed further research in to understanding the psychological factors associated with emotional responses to receiving genetic risk information (Bennett et al., 2008).

Adapting the intervention

There is potential for this intervention to be developed in to a mobile phone App tailored to suit individual needs. Self-help smart phone apps have shown to be effective for reducing stress and anxiety (Børøsund et al., 2020).