The efficacy of a group-based exercise and a sexuality education program for prostate cancer survivors

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PCa survivors

- More men with PCa living longer post-diagnosis 

- Experience significant reductions in QoL, increased fatigue & challenges to sexual health 

PCa survivors

- Significant declines in muscular strength, aerobic fitness & overall PFC \(^4\)

- 91% moderate-severe erectile dysfunction \(^5\)

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Exercise for PCa survivors

• Exercise has a positive impact on QoL for PCa survivors 6

• RT and/or AT can reduce fatigue & improve QoL, muscular strength & aerobic fitness 7,8

Sexuality education

• Education and support in a group setting improves optimism about future functioning, normalises the experience and reduces anxiety ⁹

• Partners of PCa survivors benefit from group education sessions by learning alternative coping mechanisms & form realistic expectations regarding sexual functioning ¹⁰


Aims & significance

• For intervention programs to be successful, participants must be engaged in the process.

• First time exercise intervention combined with sexuality education program.

• Feasibility study.

• Documented PCa survivors’ experiences.
Participants

- Prostate Cancer Foundation of North Queensland
- Age range 44-80yrs (mean 66 ± 14.5yrs)
- Treated for/diagnosed with PCa over the last 3 years:
  - free of cardiovascular or musculoskeletal conditions that may preclude safe participation in the exercise programs;
  - have medical consent from their primary clinician; and
  - not have participated in any structured exercise/sexuality education program within the last six months
Outcome measures

• Fatigue
  – Brief Fatigue Inventory (BFI)
  – Nine items scored 0-10

• Quality of Life
  – EORTC QLQ-C\textsubscript{30}
  – 28 questions (4-pt scale) & 2 questions (7-pt scale)
  – Scores for global health, 5 domains & 9 symptoms
Outcome measures

• Sexual function
  – Index of sexual satisfaction (ISS)
  – 25 Likert type items
• Muscular strength & endurance
  – 30 sec sit to stand test
• Aerobic fitness
  – 2min walk test
Exercise intervention

• Eight-week group-based exercise intervention & sexuality education program

• Exercise intervention
  – 3 exercise sessions/week
  – 5 minute warm-up, 25-30 mins of RT, 15-30 mins of AT & 5 minute cool-down
  – RT component involved nine progressive RT exercises that target the main muscle groups of the body
  – AT involved walking and was performed at a perceived exertion of 11-13 on Borg scale
Sexuality education

• Sexual education program
  – 4 sessions, 45-60 mins
  – Short talk/presentation
  – Questions & answers & group sharing of problems & solutions
  – Sessions covered:
    • impact of PCa on sexual function
    • sexuality, relationships and intimacy
    • enjoying intimacy and sexuality despite limitations
    • function and formation of self-help groups
Data analysis

• One-on-one semi-structured interviews
• One hour interview on strengths & weaknesses of program & how it could be improved
• Partners of 3 participants attended program & were asked for feedback
• Transcriptions analysed thematically to understand strengths & weaknesses as perceived by participants
Results of outcome measures

- Five participants achieved 90% attendance
- All participants increased sit-to-stand reps & distance achieved in 2min walk test
- Four participants decreased symptom score on EORTC QLQ-C30
- Three participants decreased their fatigue index score & increased in QoL score on EORTC QLQ-C30
Results of interviews

• Strengths of intervention program
  – Motivation
  – Social aspect
  – Identifying with others
  – Exercise facilitator

• Area for improvement
  – Intensity of exercise
Theme - motivation

“It forced me to do something, get out of bed”

“It got me up, moving & doing exercise as I have a tendency to be a slug”

“Enjoyed the exercise- just getting out and ‘doing it’”

“…started losing weight after two weeks…where I wanted to lost it too”
Theme – social aspect

“I didn’t feel alone”

“Meeting new people”

“Great group of people, welcoming & encouraging”

“The group situation”
Theme – identifying with others

“Talking to other men & being able to identify with them”

“(The program was) particularly designed for us…felt I got a lot out of it”

“People shared things they wouldn’t have otherwise talked about/known”

“Camaraderie – being with others who were facing the same issues”
Theme – exercise facilitator

“The facilitator had a very helpful & sympathetic attitude”

“The facilitator did a fantastic job”

“A great instructor”
Theme – exercise intensity

“I didn’t get much out of the walking”

“I found the walking pace a bit slow”

“Could have gone a bit more vigorous”

“Increase the intensity of exercises”
“The content was sufficient & relevant”

“Would like more information on aids or alternatives…”

“…more information on how men & women see themselves now…how have things changed”

“Felt a bit outside the scope of the thing due to my age (80yrs)”
Future considerations
Sexuality education

• Participant age
  – Younger & older participant’s experience different

• Personal situation
  – Relationship status has bearing on attitude to sexuality

• Future research
  – Initial focus group teaching basic information
  – Determine participant’s attitude towards sexuality
  – Administer questionnaire to identify individual needs
Future considerations

Exercise intervention

- Individual fitness levels
- Resistance & aerobic training
- Include partners when possible
- Role of facilitator vital to create a positive atmosphere
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