Feasibility, Acceptability, And Preliminary Efficacy Of A Web-Based Intervention Promoting Sexual Recovery For Couples Coping with Prostate Cancer

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BACKGROUND

• Prostate cancer (CaP) survivors and their partners suffer from treatment-related sexual side effects that adversely affect their relationships and quality of life.

• We have previously described the design and implementation of a web-based intervention designed to provide pre-treatment preparation and post-treatment support for couples’ sexual recovery. Intervention content was tailored to CaP treatment type and sexual orientation. The intervention spanned 7 months, and comprised 6 interactive modules, supplemented by coping strategies periodically delivered by email.

• The intervention was evaluated in a multi-institutional RCT.

OBJECTIVE

• We assessed the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy of a web-based intervention promoting sexual recovery for couples coping with CaP.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

• Study design: Qualitative structured telephone interviews of CaP survivors and their partners who had been randomized to the intervention arm of the RCT, and completed all 6 interactive modules

• Study cohort: Randomly selected sample of 12 couples

• Measurements: Study participants were queried about:
  (a) their reason(s) for participating in the RCT
  (b) ease of use of the intervention
  (c) utility of the intervention
  (d) aspects of the intervention that were/were not helpful
  (e) aspects of the intervention that should be modified
  (f) their willingness to recommend the intervention to other CaP survivors and partners

• Analysis: Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed for common themes.

INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<td>1. Pre-treatment education</td>
<td>Each intervention module has the following sections:</td>
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<td>2. Preparing to resume sexual activity</td>
<td>• video introduction featuring an individual or couple affected by prostate cancer, or a relevant expert, such as a sex therapist,</td>
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<td>3. Beginning to recover sexual intimacy as a couple</td>
<td>• educational content,</td>
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<td>4. Integrating sex into life’s routine</td>
<td>• an activity for couples to engage in online,</td>
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<td>5. Effective sexuality after prostate cancer treatment</td>
<td>• an opportunity to identify patient and partner concerns.</td>
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<td>6. How to speak to medical providers about sexual problems</td>
<td>Each intervention module lasts approximately 45 min or less.</td>
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<td>7. Follow-up module’s activity.</td>
<td>After each module, participants will receive, via email, tailored strategies based on concerns they raised during the immediately preceding module’s activity.</td>
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RESULTS

Feasibility

• All participants were able to access and use the intervention.

• The most common reason for study participation was to help other affected couples, followed by personal concern for sexual side effects of CaP treatment.

• Couples engaged with the intervention simultaneously but sometimes using separate computers/rooms.

Efficacy

• All participants found the intervention educational, and useful for improving their interpersonal communication.

• In contrast, participants universally reported little value in the strategies received outside the interactive intervention by email.

• No couples reported expanding their sexual activity repertoire beyond familiar foreplay and intercourse as a result of the intervention.

• Participants universally recommended the intervention for other couples undergoing CaP treatment.

DISCUSSION

• A web-based intervention is an accessible and acceptable tool for improving communication and promoting sexual recovery amongst CaP survivors and their partners.

• Of particular value is the potential for this intervention to be customized to address specific patient/partner needs.

References


DISCUSSION

Patient: "I think what really happened was…initially, my partner was somewhat resistant to the study and as I started doing it and reading it out loud…she and I started to kind of talk to each other about these particular topics. So we got a little more comfortable talking about that with each other. So I think that was a big plus for both of us, definitely for me".

Partner: "I would recommend it…Especially as the women, because we don’t have any control over what the patient is going through or will experience. I mean it definitely affects me, but to kind of emphasize or appreciate it form his perspective. It helped me kind of shift my perspective on things".

Patient: "It was helpful…It helped my wife have a better understanding of the things that I’m going through, and it helped me better understand what she might or could be going through. I mean, I actually I think when we were going through it I think it helped make us closer as a couple."

Patient: "Well I think…the sexual part of it is kind of private. And it’s hard to open up about some of these things…I think [an intervention on the Internet] was easier than actually talking to someone face-to-face because to me it would be a little bit embarrassing."

Partner: "The website, it kind of reassures that there are other people that have the same concerns about this next phase. You’re not alone. They have these little interviews about what people were talking about and experiencing".

Acceptability

• Most participants reported being comfortable with intervention content.

• Most couples valued the video content integrated into the intervention; it helped them feel part of a larger community of couples sharing similar challenges and experiences.

• Participants universally appreciated the ability to receive tailored educational content, and to select the level of detail appropriate for them, especially with respect to sexual aids.