

New findings could lower risk of suicide in men with prostate cancer

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Men with prostate cancer are twice as likely to commit suicide, but a method where they put intrusive thoughts into words may reduce this risk, reveals research at the Sahlgrenska Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

In a study at the University of Gothenburg's Sahlgrenska Academy, researchers surveyed the thoughts of 833 Swedish men before and after surgery for prostate cancer. The suicide rate in this group is high, and the aim of the study was to map the men's thoughts.

One in four thought about death

"Our results show that 73% of the men had sudden involuntary negative intrusive thoughts about their cancer at some point before surgery, and almost 60% still had these thoughts three months after surgery," says Thordis Thorsteinsdottir, in whose thesis the results are reported. "One in four thought about their own death at least once a week."

Lower perceived quality of life

Her thesis shows that men who do not expect to be cured by the treatment have negative intrusive thoughts more often. "Men who often think these thoughts about their prostate cancer before surgery are more likely to have low or moderate perceived [quality of life](#) three months afterwards," says Thorsteinsdottir.

New method can reduce intrusive thoughts

Her thesis discusses a method which can reduce these intrusive thoughts. Known as expressive writing, the method has been tested on other [cancer patients](#) with good results and involves getting the men affected to spend 20 minutes writing down their feelings on at least three occasions after getting their [cancer diagnosis](#).

Easier to talk

The idea is that this helps the men to put their intrusive thoughts into words. It is then easier to talk to friends and family, which reduces their [negative thoughts](#) and so improves their [mental health](#).

"[Health professionals](#) could be better at communicating with men who have had a cancer diagnosis," says Thorsteinsdottir. "If every man was asked 'What do you think about your cancer and your future?' and we then took the time to listen, we might be in a better position to help them handle this new situation and prevent drastic actions such as suicide."

Covers 4,000 men

The thesis is the first from a study which, once data collection is complete, will cover 4,000 men with [prostate cancer](#) from 13 urology clinics in Sweden. The study is being led by Eva Haglind from the Sahlgrenska Academy.

The thesis has been successfully defended.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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