

Stress relief techniques help cancer patients overcome fear of treatment

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A service evaluation at The Christie NHS Foundation Trust in Manchester, England, has shown the benefit of rapid stress management techniques (RSMTs) to help cancer patients who experience 'procedure-related' stress.

Cancer [patients](#) benefit from stress relief techniques and [complementary therapy](#) to manage their fears of [medical procedures](#), according to a new [service](#) evaluation study.

Patients experiencing distress related to medical procedures were able to achieve a 'calm state' both before and during procedures as a result of the interventions. Those who took part were positive about the experience.

The study, reported in the journal *Cancer Nursing Practice*, was carried out at the acute oncology complementary therapy service at the Christie NHS Foundation Trust in Manchester among patients who had been experiencing difficulties such as needle phobia, claustrophobia, and the fear of nausea before actual treatment.

Face to face or telephone interviews were conducted with 19 patients – most of whom were women. All had been referred to the service over distress related to radiotherapy and chemotherapy procedures.

The four themes picked up were: being distressed; coping with distress; surviving distress and thoughts about the complementary service.

Interviews revealed pre-existing phobias, the experience of flashbacks to previous traumatic events, fear of the disease spreading and the possibility of dying.

Participants typically reported being taught two rapid stress [management techniques](#), sometimes after another brief complementary treatment such as massage, aromatherapy or reflexology. On learning self-help techniques, one patient described the benefits: 'mindfulness, self hypnosis and relaxation... to help me to look at things in a different way... not to panic... to be able to sleep because I was exhausted...'

Complementary therapies helped participants avoid negative feelings, such as loneliness, fear or exhaustion, the study found. The service also helped participants maintain 'mind over matter'. Feelings of panic were reduced and even enabled patients to 'fight' the disease.

The most commonly used [stress management](#) techniques deployed were: tightening and releasing stress balls in time with four slow breaths; redirecting the 'fight or flight' response by tightening and releasing groups of muscles combined with slow comfortable breaths, and taking a sip of water and holding it on the tongue for ten seconds before swallowing, repeating the process three times.

More information: "The value of stress relieving techniques." *Cancer Nursing Practice*. 14, 4, 14-21. journals.rcni.com/doi/abs/10.7446/cnp.14.4.14.e1167

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