

New talking therapy could help cancer survivors cope after treatment

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Credit: Queen Mary, University of London

Even though cancer survivors may be in good physical health or in long-term remission, the impact of cancer and its treatment can be very difficult. The researchers hope that the new therapy will transform aftercare for those living with and beyond cancer.

The project will also involve leading researchers from Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, University of Westminster, Brunel University, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and University of Southampton.

A third of patients have poor quality of life

Co-Chief Investigator Professor Steph Taylor from QMUL said: "There are some two million [cancer survivors](#) in the UK, which is a great success story, but about a third of these patients report poor quality of life or well-being. This is because of problems such as fatigue, fear of [cancer](#) recurrence, and concerns about returning to work.

"If the talking-based therapy proves successful and cost effective, it could be implemented across the NHS to help those cancer survivors who are struggling to cope after the completion of their treatment."

Previous research suggests that a talking treatment - [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) - and exercise have some effect on improving the quality of life of cancer survivors.

The SURvivors' Rehabilitation Evaluation after CANcer (SURECAN) project will assess a variation of a talking therapy known as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which puts patients' views about what they value most in their lives at the heart of the therapy. ACT helps patients to accept what they cannot change (e.g. the cancer might recur) and commit themselves to goals they are able to and want to achieve, based on their own values (e.g. becoming closer to loved ones).

As it is known that exercise is helpful and work is important to many patients, the therapy will have options for physical activity and work support, if these are deemed important by the patient.

'We were helped through our anger and grief'

Adrienne Morgan is a 61 year old breast cancer survivor and scientist from Clerkenwell, London, who is advising on the project from Independent Cancer Patients' Voice. She said: "When I was diagnosed with incurable [metastatic breast cancer](#), my husband and I were very fortunate to have counselling. We were helped through our anger and grief, brought to accept our 'new normal' and taught the tools to cope and enjoy every day as well as possible.

"Had we been given this counselling earlier, after my initial treatment, it would have helped enormously in adapting to that new normal, and I may have even been able to continue working in the job that I loved."

The project aims to conduct a full trial of 344 participants at three centres in London and Sheffield to determine whether the talking-based therapy improves quality of life more than usual aftercare, and will involve Macmillan Cancer Support.

SURECAN will also look at safety and cost-effectiveness, evaluate for whom and how the [therapy](#) works best, and how it could be adapted for different cultures, including many [patients](#) at Barts Health NHS Trust in East London whose first language is Sylheti.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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