Media release

**Online intervention may help men get their lives back on track after testicular cancer**

Testicular cancer is the second most common form of cancer in young Australian men (18-39). Young adult survivors face unique psychological and social issues. Two thirds of Australian testicular cancer survivors report needing help facing challenges after testicular cancer, but do not receive this help. A new preliminary study conducted by Dr Ben Smith shows online interventions could be a feasible and effective means to supporting testicular cancer survivors in their long-term recovery.

Testicular cancer leaves a lot of young survivors. More than 95% of men diagnosed are successfully treated. Despite a good prognosis, many testicular cancer (TC) survivors report long-term psychological problems. These findings suggest that our health system is not able to meet their needs and that interventions to deal with these issues are called for.

To address these unmet needs Dr Smith and a team of researchers including oncologists, psychologists, and testicular cancer survivors developed a pilot online intervention program (e-TC) in collaboration with Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group (ANZUP) and the Psycho-Oncology Cooperative Research Group (PcCoG). Dr Smith presented the results of his pilot testing of e-TC at the ANZUP Annual Scientific Meeting on Monday July 13:

Dr Smith said “Preliminary testing of e-TC showed high levels of satisfaction with the intervention and some indication it may improve TC survivors’ psychological wellbeing and quality of life.”

Testicular cancer can affect how men perceive their male role. It also impacts fertility, and sexual functioning. Anxiety and depression are almost twice as common in testicular cancer survivors, compared with the general population. Online intervention is an area of great interest because of the difficulties engaging and supporting men, particularly younger men.

At the ANZUP ASM Dr Smith said “We’ve seen a high proportion of men interested in e-TC. Fortunately our pilot study has borne some promising results. With further tailoring, e-TC could become a helpful way of supporting testicular survivors that is widely accessible, convenient to access and free from stigma.”

The collaborative study was conducted between July 2014 and March 2015. 51 men were invited and 27 signed up. The study included 6 modules that sought to address a number of issues; equipping men with cognitive and behavioural tools, dealing with fears and anxiety, challenging thoughts, and working on relationships and communication. The results showed small improvements in a range of issues including anxiety, depression, body image and patients’ future perspective on life.
One of the study participants said:

“It actually provides you a private way of finding information out without actually having to necessarily... disclose everything to somebody and you can get information and know where to go to if you are needing further assistance, which I think is really valuable.”

Overall the non-clinical sample that took part in the study showed moderate benefits. The hope is that the anxious or depressed subset of survivors would benefit far more from online interventions. With refinement, future e-TC programs could become a simple, accessible way for men to get the support they need to not just survive cancer, but to regain a high quality of life once more.

About Ben Smith

Dr Ben Smith is a research coordinator at the Psycho-Oncology Co-operative Research Group (PoCoG), The University of Sydney. Ben’s work investigating the psychological wellbeing and quality of life of Australian testicular cancer survivors is conducted in collaboration with the Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group. Ben’s PhD study was supported Cancer Australia, beyondblue and Australian Rotary Health. The development and pilot testing of e-TC was supported by Cancer Council Australia and Sydney Catalyst.

About ANZUP

ANZUP is the Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group Ltd, Australia’s leading independent clinical trials research organisation in urogenital and prostate cancer. Its Annual Scientific Meeting is held 12-14 July at the Sofitel Wentworth Hotel in Sydney.

Interviews: Available with Dr Ben Smith, ANZUP Chair Professor Ian Davis, and other participating researchers.
Follow the Conference Activity #ANZUP15 and follow @ANZUPtrials

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