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CONQUER FEAR: THE DEVELOPMENT AND PILOT TESTING OF A NOVEL PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT FOR FEAR OF CANCER RECURRENCE

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Although 26–56% of cancer survivors report moderate to high levels of need for help with fear of cancer recurrence (FCR), there are currently few FCR-specific treatments available.

Aims: To describe the development and evaluation of a novel 5-session therapist-delivered psychological intervention for FCR in cancer survivors.

Methods: The manualised intervention was developed by clinicians from the Psycho-Oncology Cooperative Research Group (PoCoG) and was based on the Common Sense Model of Illness, Self-Regulatory Executive Function Model (S-REF) and Relational Frame Theory. Eight experienced clinical psychologists and one psychiatrist completed a 1-day training session. Eligibility criteria for the pilot included: diagnosis with prostate, breast or colorectal cancer, completed hospital-based treatment at least 2 months prior, no active disease, and a score of 13 or higher on the FCRI Severity Index. Data were collected pre-treatment, at treatment completion and 2 months post-treatment.

Results: Of the recruited 8 patients all completed the intervention, and on average reported a decrease in FCR of 8.2 points on the 36-point FCR severity subscale ($p = 0.002$, effect-size 1.9); an increase in Quality of life of 13.0 points on the 100-point FACT-G ($p = 0.2$, effect-size 0.67) and a decrease of 17.7 points on the 75-point impact of events scale ($p = 0.03$, effect-size 1.2). Patients rated the helpfulness of the therapy on average as 8/10 for treating their FCR. All therapists agreed that the training was informative, of appropriate length and applicable to their clinical practice. Confidence in treating FCR increased from 5.7 pre-training to 8 post-training (where 10 represents highest confidence).

Conclusions: Although this is one-armed study with a very small sample size, the patient and therapist pilot data indicate the likely success of this intervention. This abstract could form part of the symposium proposal titled ‘An international perspective on advances in the treatment of Fear of Cancer Recurrence’