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

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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 inter-national perspective on advances in the treatment of Fear of Cancer Recurrence’