Managing Fear of Cancer Recurrence

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Disclosures

• Neither speaker has any commercial interest or financial relationship to disclose
Learning Objectives

- Recognize key characteristics of Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)
- Understand FCR’s impact on mental health and health care use
- Identify adaptive, healthy coping strategies for managing FCR

Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)

“Fear, worry, or concern about cancer returning or progressing”

(Lebel et al., 2016)

- Very common concern among patients
- Between 40-70% of survivors live with some FCR
Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)

Common Triggers

- Expected:
  1. Upcoming appointments/scans
  2. Anniversary of diagnosis
  3. Social gatherings

- Unexpected:
  1. New physical symptom, ongoing side effects
  2. Reminders (e.g., commercials, billboards, hearing of someone else’s diagnosis)

Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)

- Low (adaptive) levels of FCR can help prompt healthy life-style changes and timely medical follow-ups

- High levels of FCR can become impairing
  - Intrusive thoughts
  - Unhelpful coping strategies
  - Unable to function
  - Excessive distress
  - Difficulty planning for the future
Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)

Examples of high FCR:
• Excessive researching on the Internet for information or symptom checking
• Repeated assurance-seeking from family, friends, and health care professionals
• Frequent ER visits or unscheduled appointments
• Avoidance of all appointments

Consequences of unmanaged FCR:
• Lower quality of life
• Lower physical function, less energy
• Higher perceived stress
• Depression
• Anxiety
Managing FCR

• In the short-term (e.g., before upcoming scans)
  • Preparing for "expected" triggers
• In the long-term (e.g., day-to-day life)
  • Preparing for "unexpected" triggers

(Adapted from existing protocols)

Managing FCR

Short-term / Expected triggers
• Practice being "in the moment"
• Use anxiety as a signal of what is important in your life
• Use diaphragmatic breathing
• Practice worry postponement
Managing FCR

Long-term Goal:

Find a balance between

Staying healthy

and

Living your life
Managing FCR

1. Work with your health care team to:
   - Obtain information about appropriate cancer screening guidelines for your type of cancer
   - Identify signs of recurrence common in your type of cancer and when they are commonly experienced

Managing FCR

For many individuals, cancer can bring about changes in perspective

2. Identify what’s important to you and how you want to live. Examples:
   - Family / friends / community
   - Spirituality / religion
   - Hobbies / new interests
Managing FCR

3. Set goals for what’s important to you
   - Example: Family
     • Schedule weekly FaceTime chats

4. Manage daily life stressors
   - Good sleep
   - Diet/exercise
   - Social support

Fear of Cancer Recurrence

Summary
• Normal and adaptive in small amounts
• High levels of FCR
  • Develop a plan with your health care team about when to check in
  • Spend time engaging in areas that are important to you
  • Manage your stress every day
Treatment Options at UNMC/Nebraska Medicine

Cancer Survivorship Clinic

Individual therapy:
Please call (402) 559-5600

References


Maheu, C., Lebel, S., Courbasson, C., Lefebvre, M., Singh, M., Bernstein, L. J., ... & Sidani, S. (2016). Protocol of a randomized controlled trial of the fear of recurrence therapy (FORT) intervention for women with breast or gynecological cancer. BMC cancer, 16(1), 1-12.
