

Cancer Related Fatigue Management

Effective outpatient strategies for
heartsink situations!

CRF in context

- Association with active disease: paraneoplastic, weight loss, anorexia and /or cachexia
- **CRF as a consequence of the cancer experience including treatment – this session:**

‘I just want my life back’

For those who enjoy a challenge

Patients treated for early cancer but then struggle

- Do people seem to be stuck in sick role when they should be 'getting on with it'?
- Is it important compared with other specific late consequences?
- Is there much we can do? and will the person do it anyway?
- And if we don't, does it matter?

Is it important?

Is it important?

Significant impact of quality of life

Downward spiral:

- Inactivity
- Physical deconditioning leading to disability
- Delayed return to work/social role
- Weight gain
- Increased risk of other comorbidities
- Compounds physical decline in older person
- Low self esteem and depression

Sarah

- 46, married, classroom assistant: enjoyed busy social life until diagnosed with breast cancer
- Lumpectomy, radiotherapy, adjuvant chemotherapy- completed nearly 2 years ago
- Referred to supportive care clinic and comes with husband
- Sarah 'Fed up with seeing doctors', tearful , 'I just want my life back'
- Husband angry- 'We keep being fobbed off, this needs to be sorted'

How can you make a difference to Sarah's situation?

- Unhelpful strategies?
- Helpful strategies?
- Next step?

Unfolding picture of Sarah's situation

- Constantly tired, no energy, not sleeping well
- Mild peripheral neuropathy, more bothered by generalised aches all over, frequent headache
- Struggling to work but often days when she has to come home early. Rarely goes out now.
- Sometimes spends entire days under duvet
- Never sleeps well, often lies awake or gets up
- Has gained over 2 stone in weight, 'not the same person'. Snappy with husband and children

Plan of action?

Any other information needed?

Assessment

- Exclude the unrecognised but treatable- anemia, hypothyroidism, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, (metastatic cancer)
- Psychological- significant mood change, self esteem, body image, cancer anxieties
- Review medication- frequent use of codeine based analgesics; pregabalin 300mg bd
- Explore support network, interests, what is important to her?

Explanation and expectations

- Acknowledge impact of cancer and treatment
- Help Sarah make sense of the situation
- Tackle 'Fixed mindset'
- Affirm that life has changed *and it's difficult-* but doesn't have to stay that way
- Be positive: plan with realistic goals, 'no quick fixes'
- Consider her sources of help and support
- Role of medication limited (unless clinical depression), may be making worse

Think about

- Short term diary- what was difficult, how most affected? And times she forgot and carried on?
- Patterns – ‘overdoing it then paying for it’? v gradual pushing back the boundaries
- For what does Sarah want to use her energy most?
- Reconnect old interests- eg in kitchen or garden , outdoors
- What would make these easier? Energy conservation , equipment

Part of Sarah's plan

Sarah's goals

- Gradual increases in activity
- Combine with dietary swaps
- Sleep hygiene – retrain old patterns
- Use of relaxation , cbt
- Plan for fatigue at work
- Less reliance on analgesics
- Identify small rewards and plan treats

Support strategy

- Enlist husband, family, friends
- Information (self help)
- Share plan with GP: local options?
 - walking groups
 - counselling
 - Dietary , physio, OT support
 - Other resources- patient groups, Maggie's centres

Does it work?

Yes!

Strong evidence that increased activity reduces fatigue and improves mood

Don't underestimate - how much we can influence and motivate

- Genuine interest
- Involve partners and the GP
- Positive affirmation of efforts and progress
- Reinforcement of message - importance of long term health and reducing risks

Final thought

Follow up is changing especially for early stage cancers:

- Do we prepare patients sufficiently for their recovery and beyond?
- How should we equip their GPs?