

Managing Cancer And Living Meaningfully (CALM): Phase 2 trial of a brief individual psychotherapy for patients with advanced cancer

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Abstract

Background: Advanced cancer brings substantial physical and psychosocial challenges that may contribute to emotional distress and diminish well-being. In this study, we present preliminary data concerning the effectiveness of a new brief individual psychotherapy, Managing Cancer And Living Meaningfully (CALM), designed to help individuals cope with this circumstance.

Aim: To test the feasibility and preliminary effectiveness of CALM to reduce emotional distress and promote psychological well-being and growth.

Design: CALM is a brief, manualized, semi-structured individual psychotherapy for patients with advanced cancer. This study employed a phase 2 intervention-only design. The primary outcome was depressive symptoms and the secondary outcomes were death anxiety, attachment security, spiritual well-being and psychological growth. These were assessed at 3 months (t1) and 6 months (t2). Multilevel regression was used to model change over time.

Setting/participants: A total of 50 patients with advanced or metastatic cancer were recruited from the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, Toronto, Canada.

Results: A total of 39 patients (78%) were assessed at baseline, 24 (48%) at t1, and 16 (32%) at t2. Analyses revealed reductions over time in depressive symptoms: $\beta = -0.13$, confidence interval (CI.95) = (-0.23, -0.022) and death anxiety: $\beta = -0.23$, CI.95 (-0.40, -0.061); and an increase in spiritual well-being: $\beta = 0.14$, CI.95 (0.026, 0.26).

Conclusions: CALM may be a feasible intervention to benefit patients with advanced cancer. The results are encouraging, despite attrition and small effect sizes, and support further study.

STRENGTHS:

- Validated tools were used to evaluate parameters: PHQ-9, FACIT-Sp112 (Spiritual Well-Being Scale), DADDS (Death Anxiety scale), ECR-M16 (Attachment security).
- Well trained practitioners administered the tools used in the study and weekly supervision of the practitioners occurred (allowing for increased homogeneity of methodology).

WEAKNESSES:

- This is a phase II study with no control group; thus, any effect found will be difficult to attribute to the intervention.
- There were a small number of participants, with a high rate of attrition.
- The clinical significance of the effect on outcomes from the study is unclear; the changes in psychological health seen over the months of the study are shown to be statistically significant but whether there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of life for the participants not apparent. As an example, the change in the study's primary outcome of depression was 1.8 on the 27 point PHQ-9 scale, which is not a large change.

RELEVANCE TO PALLIATIVE CARE:

Psychological well-being is important in palliative care and will have an impact on the quality of life of our patients. If patients are better able to cope with their disease, it will be easier to assist them in achieving a higher quality of life; they will likely be able to make better decisions regarding their care and will be able to manage the losses and challenges of end stage disease. Pending results from the planned phase III trials, the

CALM tool may prove to be useful for the palliative patient group. The current study did not show dramatic improvement in the various psychological markers, but perhaps prevention of decline will be shown to be a useful outcome. The fact that this is a Canadian study may make it more relevant for our patient population.

From Wikipedia: Summaries of the foundational theories behind the study.

RELATIONAL THEORY:

- Significant writer: Stephen A. Mitchell

Relationalists argue that personality emerges from the matrix of early formative relationships with parents and other figures.

- Relationalists, argue that the primary motivation of the psyche is to be in relationships with others.

ATTACHMENT THEORY:

- Significant writer: John Bowlby

- describes the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans. Its most important tenet is that an infant needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally. Attachment theory explains how much the parents' relationship with the child influences development.

Levels of attachment: Secure, anxious, avoidant, ambivalent, disorganized.

EXISTENTIAL theory:

- Significant writer: Irvin D. Yalom

- a philosophical method of therapy that operates on the belief that inner conflict within a person is due to that individual's confrontation with the givens of existence. These givens, as noted by Irvin D. Yalom, are: the inevitability of death, freedom and its attendant responsibility, existential isolation (referring to phenomenology), and finally meaninglessness.