

Mindfulness, acceptance and meaning in life for adults with cancer

This study is approved by the Health and Disability Ethics Committee - New Zealand (16/NTA/75) and registered at ANZCTR - trial Id number: ACTRN12616000647437

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Introduction

Psychological support can be crucial for people with advanced stages of cancer (III and IV), as they adapt to a new reality of having a life-threatening, progressive disease with no prognosis of cure. Mindfulness-Based Interventions can potentially assist this group in facing the disease course.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness meditation is designed to cultivate the ability to be in the present moment, in an accepting and non-judgmental way [1].

What is meaning in life?

Defined as an existential domain, it is the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence.

What is acceptance?

Acceptance should not be confused with pessimism, giving-up or resignation. Acceptance is the act of embracing experiences in a non-judgmental way, in order to usefully work with emotional obstacles.

Study's aims:

- To develop a mindfulness training package for adults with advanced cancer
- To evaluate the feasibility of the recruitment strategy
- To gather preliminary data regarding the efficacy of the training in improving patients' mindful coping skills + acceptance attitudes + reflections about meaning in life
- To evaluate how participants experience the mindfulness training package

Audio Sessions

- 4 audio sessions of 30 minutes each
- Once a week, one to one with the researcher

Coping with cancer



MINDFULLY

Inclusion criteria:

- Diagnosis of advanced cancer/stage III or IV
- 18 years old +
- English speaker

Exclusion criteria:

- Hospitalization
- Severe current psychiatric disorders
- Neurological & auditory impairment



Audio Session 1

Guided meditation + awareness + mindful coping skills



Audio Session 2

Guided meditation + reflections about acceptance attitudes



Audio Session 3

Guided meditation + reflections about meaning in life



Audio Session 4

Closure + encouraging self-management coping

One-group pre-post test design with a mixed methods approach.



Quantitative measurements: (Data collection in progress)

- Mindful Coping Scale (MCS) [2]
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ-II) [3]
- Meaning in life Questionnaire (MLQ) [4]



Qualitative measurements:

Semi-structured interviews (pre & post) using a qualitative descriptive analysis

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“...with this lung cancer, I am afraid that the next breath will not come and I will die” (Liz - pre-intervention)

“I am not afraid anymore and not even worried, actually, I feel peaceful” (Liz - post-intervention)



“...expressing how I feel, I am not good at that. I just want to get rid of this anger” (Tony - pre-intervention)

“...big things that happened to me in the past that I cannot do anything about, I have learned they really are gone now...I accepted it. I was getting angry about the health system but I cannot change the system... that guy that did not find my cancer early enough, the poor doctor was just doing his best. This mindfulness has taught me how to handle things, not just cancer, in fact, the cancer is not a problem to me now, what will be will be. I think I have got rid of the anger” (Tony - post-intervention)



“...I am now more conscious of the decisions I make and why... awareness of your body, that's important too...I've never thought about the times I had been courageous in my life until I listened to that Session 3 ...this training was a learning curve” (Helen - post-intervention)

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Results – preliminary data:



- Currently, 15 participants have completed the intervention (100% adherence and attendance for intervention)
- All but one participant found the training helpful/supportive
- Pre-test data showed a few participants already considered they had a positive attitude and an acceptance stance

Majority of participants experienced changes in thoughts & actions:



- More aware of the present moment - more reflective
- Feeling calmer and release of anger
- Can better handle situations using their breathing
- Decided to make time for family
- Family was often cited as meaningful
- Money was mentioned as not important at all
- Things considered important and that give them joy were the simple things in life

References:

- [1] Kabat-Zinn, J. (2004). Wherever you go there you are. UK: Piatkus.
- [2] Tharaldsen, K. B., & Bru, E. (2011). Validation of the mindful coping scale. Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 16(1):87-103.
- [3] Bond, F. W., Hayes, S. C., Baer, R. A., Carpenter, K. M., Guenole, N., Orcutt, H. K., . . . Zettle, R. D. (2011). Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II: A revised measure of psychological flexibility and acceptance. Behavior Therapy, 42, 676-688.
- [4] Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the Presence of and Search for Meaning in Life. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 53(1), 80-93.