

The Effect of a Mental Health Intervention on Health Behaviors among Cancer Survivors: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxious Cancer Survivors in Community Clinics



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The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For the full text and references, please visit https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate_honors_theses/xk81jm90q or scan the QR code.

Abstract

Background: Adherence to health behavior guidelines (i.e., limiting alcohol use, remaining physically active, maintaining a healthy diet, quitting smoking) for cancer survivors can reduce the risk of cancer recurrence, improve survival rates, and improve quality of life (QOL; WCRF/AICR, 2007; Demark et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2020). Adherence to health behavior guidelines among patients with cancer is low, ranging from 7-40% across health behaviors (Tollosa, 2019).

Methods: The present study evaluated the effectiveness of an acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) group intervention (Valued Living; VL) delivered by social workers in community oncology clinics designed to target anxiety, to improve health behaviors relative to enhanced usual care (EUC). One hundred thirty-five cancer survivors with moderate to high anxiety were randomized 1:1 to Valued Living (VL; a 7-session ACT-informed group) or EUC (usual onsite supportive care plus an emailed list of resources). Participants self-reported health behaviors (i.e., tobacco use, alcohol use, dietary risk behavior, and physical activity) at baseline, and 1-week post-intervention.

Results: There was no statistically significant effect of treatment on health behaviors. Alcohol and tobacco use were not significantly correlated at baseline; physical activity was weakly, negatively correlated with fast food, snacks, or pizza consumption and moderately, positively correlate fruit and vegetable consumption. Fruit and vegetable consumption was weakly, negatively correlated with fast food, snacks and pizza consumption. Binge drinking was moderately positively correlated with soda and sweetened drink intake. Participant health behavior rates were: 9.02% reported tobacco use in the last 30 days; 20.30% binge alcohol use; 46.90% exercised 150 minutes or more each week. *Conclusions:* Interventions that integrate mental and behavioral health, and/or medical referrals for participants that struggle with health behaviors are needed to improve study beneficence and utilize a critical opportunity to provide care to people who need it.