

Hopelessly Devoted – Wellness and Supportive Care at the ONJ Centre Radiotherapy Department

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Background

The Wellness and Supportive Care Team coordinate a range of evidence-based therapies and programs. They are designed to provide support, information and offer strategies to assist patients and loved ones during and after cancer treatment. The Covid 19 pandemic significantly impacted the ability to access and deliver these services. Opportunity arose to evaluate and address referral pathways that were being reopened or reinvigorated, for patients receiving Radiotherapy.

Exercise Physiology (EP) is offered to patients receiving treatment in the ONJ Centre as an outpatient service. Clinical trial evidence has established the role of individualised exercise training in reducing many treatment-related side effects, including fatigue². Fatigue is the most prevalent and problematic side effect among radiotherapy patients and therefore, exercise training plays an important role in maintaining quality of life this specific population.

Aims

- Improve the patient experience; optimising referral timing and access to Wellness programs and therapies, especially EP
- Increase awareness and educate staff about the wellness and supportive care programs currently available.

Method

The Nursing and Wellness teams took a collaborative approach to review current processes and pathways for patients to access wellness programs, services and activities in Radiotherapy. All patients are screened with the accredited National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Distress Thermometer and Problem List (Fig:1)¹. The results from screening is used to make appropriate referrals to wellness activities including EP.

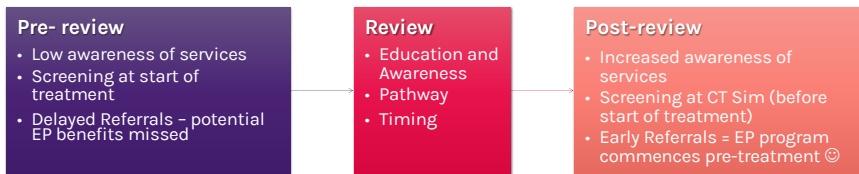


Fig: 1 NCCN Distress Thermometer and Problem List¹

Results

Since implementing the change in timing and process, we have seen an increase in engagement and referrals.

- The screening tool is completed after the patient's initial simulation appointment
- Patients are accessing the services earlier and at a more beneficial time during their treatment
- Fatigue is the primary reason for referrals to EP (Fig:2)
- Preliminary results in Exercise Physiology have demonstrated a consistent increase in the rate of referrals, early in treatment (Fig:3)

Fig: 2: Primary Reason for Referral to Exercise Physiology

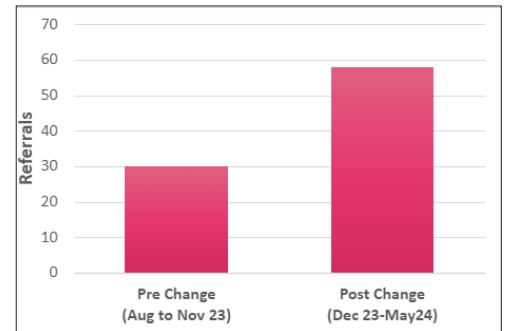
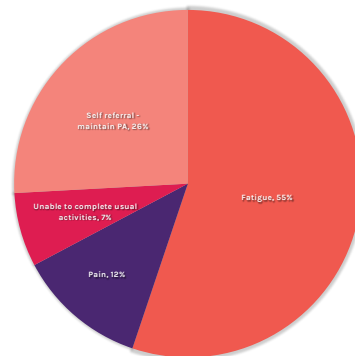


Fig: 3: Referrals Pre & Post Education and process change

Focus on EP

The eight week, twice weekly combined aerobic and resistance exercise training program is tailored to each individual and supervised by a team of accredited Exercise Physiologists.

- Attendance rates to this intervention is **85%** across the group
- Physical function is measured pre and post participation which has **consistently demonstrated an improvement** across the cohort

Conclusion

The review of our referral processes has led change and offered direct benefit to the patients. Referrals are consistently being implemented early in the Radiotherapy patient journey, providing access to EP at a time that supports optimal wellbeing and outcomes.

The Nursing and Wellness teams have worked collaboratively to enhance their understanding of the programs available, how to access them and the effect on the patient experience.

References

1. NCCN Guidelines Version 1.2024 Distress management, https://www.nccn.org/docs/default-source/patient-resources/nccn_distress_thermometer.pdf
2. Campbell KL, Winters-Stone KM, Wiskemann J, May AM, Schwartz AL, Courneya KS, et al. Exercise guidelines for cancer survivors: consensus statement from international multidisciplinary roundtable. Med Sci Sports Exerc. 2019;51(11):2375-90.

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