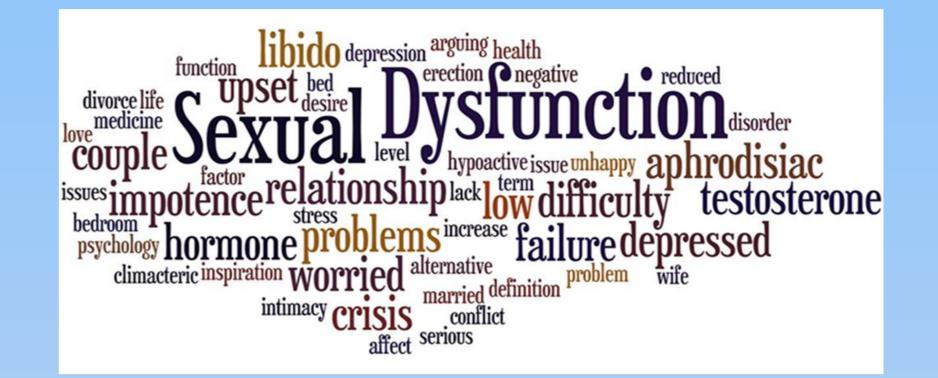


SEXUAL CARE AFTER RADIOTHERAPY CLINIC

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INTRODUCTION

Radiotherapy patients have a high level of unmet sexuality needs both before, during and after treatment (Armes, Crowe et al. 2009). It is reported that this area is neglected in routine cancer follow up with healthcare professionals being uncomfortable at discussing sexuality and intimacy; and not having the time or skills to address and manage these issues (Fallowfield, Saul, Gilligan 2001; Stead et al. 2003) . Three staff members underwent introductory IPM training and one went on to receive further training and has become a Diplomat.



DISCUSSION

Patients and staff now have a place to go to for help with this difficult topic. Patients can discretely self-refer or healthcare professionals can refer patients. They no longer have to suffer in silence, there is a safe space for them to discuss their concerns and gain support and advice for management. In the appointment we aim to provide information and support for both physical and psychosexual problems. Advice includes discussion around the feelings about their changed body, their phantasies, their grief and trying to alleviate their fears. Reflection and silence is used to enable to patient to truly think about their feelings. We also offer lifestyle advice and onward referral to specialist services where required for example the menopause clinic, psychological medicine input or specific psychosexual therapy.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

We set up a Therapeutic Radiographer-led Sexual Care after Radiotherapy clinic in 2018 where we see men and women who have had radiotherapy treatment and are struggling with sexual function, body image or intimacy concerns. To date we have seen 144 patients. Some patients have had one appointment and others have had up to four appointments. We audited the service in 2021 where the responses from patients were overwhelmingly positive.



RESULTS

The most common words used in the feedback were



CONCLUSION

We have made a positive impact on the patients that we have seen to date. Future work would be to try to capture patients from all disease sites as we have only seen patients with urological, breast, gynaecological and colorectal cancers. We are also planning on using validated questionnaires in each appointment so that we can more accurately assess the impact of our appointments. We would like to be able to expand our clinic to see patients who have undergone cancer treatment other than radiotherapy as we know that there is a need for this support for patients who have undergone chemotherapy, surgery or hormone and immunotherapy.

"compassionate, professional, supportive, understanding and caring". We have more recently been asking patients to complete an online feedback form. Even though the response rate has been poor, the comments from patients have again been positive. Staff have been described as "compassionate, caring and helpful" and "polite and understanding". Patients said "great to know there's a place and follow up beyond radiotherapy", "thank you for making this service available", "thank you for helping to discuss a difficult subject" and "I'm so grateful to have had this opportunity to discuss how to improve my sexual health and relationship with my partner".

References

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Stead ML, Browen JM, Fallowfield L, Selby P. Lack of communication between healthcare professionals and women with ovarian cancer about sexual issues. *Br J Canc* 2003:88:666-71