

Coaching Cancer Patients and Their Caregivers in Creating SMARTTER Coping Plans

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BACKGROUND

- Cancer diagnosis carries a heavy burden for patients and caregivers¹.
- Many coping skills needed to manage the challenges of the diagnosis⁴.
- *Coping-Together* is a manual-based, self-directed coping skills training intervention for patient-caregiver dyads facing cancer. It shows promise in decreasing burden and maintaining dyadic cohesion. However, earlier studies have shown that some patients and caregivers needed more support to adhere to the material².

OBJECTIVE

Develop a **lay**, telephone-based coaching* model, which will guide patient-caregiver dyads in:

- a) Their navigation of *Coping-Together*
- b) Supporting the learning of new coping skills
- c) Providing support so they may apply their new coping skills in their daily lives.

***The coaching model** is based on training non-professional individuals to provide the additional support in using *Coping-Together*

METHODS

As part of a pilot trial for *Coping-Together*, a previously evaluated³ lay coaching model for cancer patients was adapted for dyads for the first time. Adaptation was guided by the developers of the original *Coping-Together* coaching model and with expertise of a couple’s therapist.

The coaching protocol includes telephone coaching calls from a trained (non-professional) self-care coach, weekly, for 20-minutes, over six weeks, to:

- a) orient the dyads to the material
- b) help dyads select relevant material based on their given needs
- c) help dyads create *coping plans* to implement the expert-recommended skills and strategies described in the manuals.

The coach supports dyads as they create a *coping plan* that will be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-oriented, TogethEr, and Rewarded** (SMARTTER), engaging both the patient and caregiver to ensure both benefit from the mutual support of one another.

RESULTS

One of the main benefits of the coaching intervention is the guidance in understanding how to apply the steps of a SMARTTER plan using the *Coping-Together* manuals. Without the guidance of a coach, dyads have struggled to identify a challenge, then choose an appropriate coping skill and execute an effective *coping plan*. It is apparent in the cases of dyads thus far, that there is often one primary participant in the coaching (often female) and some prompting is needed to involve the other member of the dyad. It is also noted thus far that caregivers were more engaged in weekly calls when the **TogethEr** component of the SMARTTER *coping plan* was discussed in depth.

Self-Management with Dyads

- *Coping-Together* continues to make further adaptations to accommodate the needs of patient-caregiver dyads.
- Coaches are trained to allow for engagement with both members of a dyad in the development of SMARTTER *coping plans*



DISCUSSION

This intervention guides participants in understanding how to apply the steps of a SMARTTER plan using the *Coping-Together* manuals. It was noted that caregivers were more engaged in weekly calls when the TogethEr component of the SMARTTER *coping plan* was discussed in depth. Lay coaching has never before been adapted for use with dyads. This strategy helps with applying the intervention materials and learning to work together as a dyad in developing new coping skills.

IMPLICATIONS

This protocol aims to develop a cost-effective dyadic model to help patients and caregivers apply coping skills together when new challenges arise throughout their experience with cancer. A coaching manual will be made available to facilitate the application of this innovative intervention in usual cancer care.

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