

A study to assess the benefits of cognitive behavioural therapy to maintain psychological well being in a group of oncologists

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A career in Oncology can be detrimental to mental health. Burn out and stress related psychological morbidity are common in oncologists and the prevalence has increased.

This year, we commenced a study designed to assess the benefits of a structured intervention, using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as the basis of a preventative strategy. Here we describe the process. Results are not available yet.

We wanted to address the issues for the whole department rather than individually. We felt that as a structured, problem orientated intervention, CBT might meet our needs and approached Dr B. Marien, who has an interest in occupational stress in doctors, to coordinate our study. We invited all senior medical staff (clinical, academic and medical oncologists and a palliative care physician) to take part. 12 out of 13 accepted and 11 have attended the majority of the sessions. We had 10 two hourly sessions of CBT as a group on a fortnightly basis. Within these sessions we used CBT techniques to address individual and common themes of stress within our working environment. In between sessions, we had 'homework' to practice the techniques we had been taught.

In order to assess the benefit of such an intervention, we completed psychometric questionnaires (the Maslach burn out inventory, the general health questionnaire, a pressure at work survey, the Jenkins sleep scale, the clinical global improvement scale and a satisfaction scale) before and after the course and 6 months later. Semi-structured interviews will be used to record our subjective impressions of the process. It is unlikely we will demonstrate significant quantitative results, but we hope to share our experience and subjective impressions of the value of our approach in a UK oncology department.