



Health promotion and illness demotion

Researchers have reported that men are more likely to deny than discuss illness-related issues, and that they tend to react to severe symptoms such as pain rather than participate in preventative health promotion programs. However, men at PCSGs are an intriguing exception to this, in that they often talk with others in the group about their cancer, and discuss strategies for maintaining health. PCSGs could help to normalize the experience of prostate cancer in a way that also promoted the collective health of group members. Three strategies were used by PCSGs to achieve this.

Living examples of healthy men

Men were reassured by seeing other survivors at the group meetings. Many men explained how they observed the practices and progress of other men to assess their own health. The presence of healthy men at the groups provided important “proof” and “hope” that survival was possible. An 81-year-old man connected with another man at the monthly PCSG meetings who had the same treatment and similar PCa biomarkers. When the man missed a few meetings he explained:

I phoned him and talked to his wife. And I said ‘Is [support group member] sick?’ And she said, ‘No he’s cross-country skiing’...and I said, ‘Well, if he can do it, I can do it too’...This is extremely important to me that you find a guy that has a Gleason of 9, that’s gone through the same treatment I’m going through now a couple years later because his was 3 years ago. He’s doing really good. He’s cross-country skiing.

Mixing health and illness information

By combining prostate cancer information with other health information, PCSGs were able to maintain the men’s interest without overwhelming them. Rather than focussing solely on prostate cancer, opportunities to promote their health were also available for the men. Many men detailed specific dietary supplements and modifications some of which were prostate cancer specific. Complementary and alternative medicines were also discussed as a means to maintaining and improving health.



Problem-specific information

The most common type of problem-specific information sharing at PCSGs was in regard to treatment options. Group members were quick to share their perspectives, and a 72-year-old participant who had recently undergone brachytherapy explained that he was able to help other men make a treatment decision:

It set his mind at ease because he was finally able to talk to somebody who has been through the brachytherapy process. Prior to that, the information he had, had come from the urologist and his family doctor who have never gone through the whole process.