

Humour

Psychosocial benefits, including improved mood and mental health, and increased quality of life, have been reported among men who routinely attend PCSG meetings. We noticed that humour was frequently a part of the groups' interactions, and this prompted us to formally examine the function of humour at PCSGs. The study findings revealed how humour could disarm men's stoicism and mark the boundaries for providing and receiving mutual help.



Disarming stoicism

By opening with a joke or inserting a humorous remark, regardless of whether it brought shrieks of laughter or a few sniggers, the men were able to manufacture something that others could actively engage with and react to. Humour often subtly disarmed stoicism in ways that did not necessarily demand talk from each and every man who attended the group. Instead, a shared joke or laughter constituted a group activity, and there was often a central character(s) in each who enjoyed sharing 'their' humour as a remedy. A 74-year-old man explained that understanding and empathy existed within the group and humour was used to signal that, and to reassure newcomers that their cancer and group-related anxiety would dissipate over time:

There are a couple of fellows there that didn't say a word all night. I could tell by their posture that they have just been diagnosed and they were obviously terrified as I was when I was first diagnosed. There's a lot of anxiety there and those fellows were not prepared to open up. Others were there who have been through this, sort of around the road on this thing. Some of them were quite humorous about this and that was a nice balance between these guys.

Marking the boundaries

Men also used humour to introduce potentially sensitive PCa issues such as urinary incontinence, sexual dysfunction, and death. A quip or joke was often put forward to gauge the group's interest, and to assess whether the discussion of ordinarily taboo topics was permissible. A long group discussion about treating erectile dysfunction (ED) took place after a 66-year-old man who had been attending PCSG meetings for three years signalled his intact male libido but acknowledged the challenges of successfully treating ED:

I was talking about using Viagra to see whether it will help, well it gave me a headache—maybe that's a good thing! There was humour about that, that went into the room. It's kind of light-hearted and people are trying to make the best of it, of a bad joke.

Humour can be integral to legitimizing men's support group involvement. A sense of humour can give a group member a tool for expressing complicated emotional states, while the wit itself may buoy self-esteem and silence self-criticism. In the PCSG settings, humour can regulate the emotional atmosphere by enlivening social interactions. Additionally, humour itself can be therapeutic because of the way it gives pleasure.