



STUDY FINDINGS: PCSGs & Canadian Healthcare Practitioners

With early detection and advanced treatment options, prostate cancer is becoming a chronic illness, rather than a terminal illness, and the demand for psychosocial support programs for men with prostate cancer and their families is arising. That said, PCSGs have been proven to be a great source of getting information, alleviating anxiety and providing reassurance throughout the illness trajectory. To further investigate the utility and value of PCSGs in accommodating different psychosocial needs of prostate cancer patients and their families, we have assessed 391 Canadian healthcare practitioners' views about PCSGs. Please click [here](#) to see the 5-point Likert-type 56-item questionnaire used in our study.

Positive influence of prostate cancer support groups on men's adjustment:

- Providing information about cancer and the treatment experience and coping from a range of perspectives
- Providing emotional support for patient or partner
- Providing opportunities to share experiences
- Facilitating social identification (feeling not alone)
- Providing reassurance to relieve anxiety
- Providing social support (friendship to combat loneliness)
- Providing access to information about community supports and resources

Negative influence of prostate cancer support groups on men's adjustment:

- Meeting with dominant members who push their own views
- Hearing misleading, inaccurate or irrelevant information
- Hearing highly negative stories with no balance
- Creating decisional conflict in relation to treatment
- Promoting one clinician
- Being too heterogeneous or confusing to meet some individuals' needs
- Having speaker topics not relevant to the man's individual situation
- Being confronting
- Promoting one treatment approach

The reasons why men may choose to attend prostate cancer support groups:

- In search of information
- To help others
- To discuss cancer, treatment and related concerns
- For social interaction
- To seek reassurance and relieve anxiety about treatment choices

The reasons why men may choose to not attend prostate cancer support groups:

- Don't want to discuss their problems with others

- Coping well and having no need
- Denial or avoidant coping
- Language difficulties
- Having enough information to make a treatment decision
- Wanting to move past their cancer experience
- A lack of knowledge about groups
- Indebtedness from receiving support
- Perceived weakness in sharing emotions

An effective prostate cancer support groups is one that...

- Has a leader trained in group facilitation and management has regular input from and communication with a broad range of medical and allied health professionals
- Avoids bias by not promoting one treatment view point
- Is patient driven
- Covers diverse topics relevant to different disease stages and treatments
- Is involved with and supported by other related health organizations

An effective online prostate cancer support group is one that...

- Uses interactive web 2.0 applications to link men who have prostate cancer and their families with others
- Provides a separate area for men and partners
- Features evidence-based health care provider presentations in real time audio/video conferences
- Does not require log in permissions to aid user anonymity
- Is led and moderated by a prostate cancer survivor
- Provides brief summaries about prostate cancer and health information
- Facilitates discussion and promotes camaraderie

Primary physicians' perspectives

Hundred and forty Canadian primary physicians who completed the survey identified 'access to information' and 'community support' as the biggest benefits of attending support groups. Accordingly, the highly endorsed reason for patients to attend PCSGs among primary physicians was to 'gain information', followed by 'discussion of prostate cancer and therapies', and 'reassurance'. While no specific negative factors proposed in the questionnaire was singled out as particularly influential, the issues around 'privacy' and 'ignorance of PCSGs' were highlighted as potential reason for men not to attend support groups. Finally, 'avoiding bias by not promoting one view of treatment' was identified as the most important characteristic of effective face-to-face PCSGs; while 'provision of summarized prostate cancer information' as the most essential feature of online support groups along with 'facilitation fostering camaraderie' and 'usage of web 2.0 application'. In the open-ended comment section, the discussion on the effective marketing of PCSGs was predominant – focusing on the need to raise public awareness of prostate cancer as well as support groups. In addition, many primary physicians believe that men would attend PCSGs primarily to obtain information; hence formal linkages with government agencies, other community-based organizations and multidisciplinary healthcare

practitioners were strongly encouraged. The idea of online PCSGs was well received – while pointing to the limited computer literacy and access among older prostate cancer patients.

Prostate cancer specialists' perspectives

A total of 150 prostate cancer specialists based in Canada completed the survey. Specifically, 100 urologists, 40 radiation oncologists and 10 medical oncologists participated in the study. While all seven characteristics proposed in the questionnaire were uniformly identified as important benefits among the specialists group, 'sharing experiences' and 'emotional support' were identified as the most important factors positively influencing men's adjustment to prostate cancer. Similar to the primary physicians group, prostate cancer specialists also highlighted 'gain information' as the main reason for men to attend PCSGs; while 'privacy' and 'ignorance of PCSGs' as the critical reasons for men not to attend prostate cancer support groups. They identified that 'meeting with dominant members', 'dissemination of inaccurate information', and 'hearing negative experiences' as the leading negative influences of PCSGs affecting men's adjustment to prostate cancer. Specialists also identified 'avoiding bias by not promoting one view of treatment', 'a range of different health care providers' input', 'being patient-driven' and 'diversity of therapies discussed' as the key characteristics for effective face-to-face PCSGs. For online support groups, they highlighted 'the use of evidence-based healthcare provider presentations', and 'the facilitation of camaraderie' as the important features of effective online PCSGs. Interesting is a contrast within the findings where prostate cancer specialists rated 'gain information' as the most important motivation for men attending groups while raising the issue of 'misinformation' as the critical negative effect of support groups – stressing the importance and necessity of disseminating valid information.

Nurses' perspectives

The survey questionnaire was completed by 101 nurses across Canada. A majority of respondents agreed that providing 'information' and 'access to information' as the major factors positively influencing men's adjustment to prostate cancer. Accordingly, they see that men join support groups 'in search of information' and 'to discuss cancer treatment and related concerns'. Interestingly, nurses also indicated that 'inaccurate or irrelevant information' was a factor that can negatively influence men with prostate cancer and their families; and, 'men's reluctance to discuss their problems with others' and 'ignorance of PCSGs' as the two major reasons why men may choose not to join the groups. Three features influencing the effectiveness of face-to-face PCSGs were identified – 1) avoid bias by not promoting one treatment view point; 2) cover diverse topics relevant to different disease stages and treatments; and, 3) have regular input from and communication with a broad range of medical and allied health professional – which all emphasized on the importance of securing reliable and relevant information. For online PCSGs, nurses suggested to 'adopt evidence-based healthcare practitioners' presentation in audio and video conferences', 'provide brief summary about prostate cancer and health information' and 'facilitating discussion and promoting camaraderie'.

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The current study findings provided important insights to Canadian healthcare practitioners' awareness of the benefits of PCSGs. Overall, the findings suggest Canadian healthcare practitioners have positive views on the value of PCSGs and agreed that it can provide a unique platform for men with prostate cancer to get much needed information and psychosocial support. Yet, they also cautioned that the information provided – be it face-to-face or online PCSGs – should be valid, accurate and relevant to

diverse individuals throughout the prostate cancer illness trajectory. Finally, formal linkages with different agencies and communities and healthcare practitioners were stressed as a critical factor for successful support groups.

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- Oliffe, J.L., Chambers, S., Garrett, B., Bottorff, J.L., McKenzie, M., Han, C.S., & Ogrodniczuk, J.S. (2015). Prostate cancer support groups: Canada-based specialists' perspectives. *American Journal of Men's Health, 9*(2), 163-172.
- Yu Ko, W.F., Oliffe, J.L., Han, C.S., Garrett, B., Henwood, T., Tuckett, A.G., & Sohrevardi, A. (In Press). Canadian nurses' perspectives on prostate cancer support groups: A survey study. *Cancer Nursing*.