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Building yourself to better cope

A CASE STUDY OF A CYCLING TEAM LED BY CANCER SURVIVORS

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OVERARCHING THEME 1

A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF SPORT AND SUPPORT

The power of the sport/support combination is that each activity facilitates the other.

RESULTS

- 9 themes
- 2 overarching themes

We are not a support group

The group's focus is cycling but support is available at members' discretion.

"People are interested in moving on, or thinking of something more positive, even if they are going through cancer treatment. It's a bit more of a positive outlook. More optimistic." (Julie, 818–826)



Right: Julie and Kay chat about Ashleigh's recent recurrence. Video still from helmet-mounted GoPro camera, participant observation ride.

THEMES

Motivation and encouragement

Motivation to ride is provided online and in person.

"... it was good because they had some riders there that were encouraging me to go up, because it was my first ride. So I really felt that it was a good acceptance by the group." (Jim, 143–149)

Cycling as therapy

Cycling can alleviate the negative emotions associated with cancer and survivorship.

"You come back from a bike ride and you've cleared your head as well as your body" (Ashleigh, 1364–1365)

Cycling as a reality check

Cycling performance is an indicator of health.

"I've always thought about the cycling being a bit of a bar for comparison. You can tell how you're going, you can tell if you're feeling okay" (Julie, 238–241)

Fitness as a defence against cancer

Members cycle to increase their physical fitness and thereby fortify their bodies against cancer.

"In the back of your mind is the recurrence side of it and the fact that you're building yourself to better cope if things weren't that great"

(Ashleigh, 1393–1395)

Shared experience of cancer

The common experience of cancer facilitates mutual support and learning.

"If I was just with a normal cycling group then [cancer is] sort of something you keep to yourself. But here, if you've got something to say, or someone has something to say, you listen, or they listen to you." (Jim, 315–320)

Forming relationships

Friendships based on common interests and experiences become a motivator to attend rides.

"We all sort of bond, and we all have our conversation around that coffee table, and I like that" (Jim, 244–245)

Belonging

A cherished sense of belonging to the team does not diminish over time.

"Because of the team you can go out by yourself and [think], I'm wearing the jersey, I'm still part of Cancer Voices" (Julie, 805–807).

Giving back

Helping others allows positive meaning to be attributed to the cancer experience.

"Once you've been through treatment a lot of people want to do something to help others." (Ashleigh, 202–203)

OVERARCHING THEME 2 SURVIVORSHIP ON SURVIVORS' TERMS

Cycling team participation offers increased agency and control over survivorship

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the experience of members of the CVSA Cycling Team?
- What features of the CVSA Cycling Team are valued by its members and have potential to inform and benefit similar programs?

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity has been shown to increase cancer survivors' quality of life and has been associated with lower cancer risk and mortality rates from some cancers. However, research indicates over half of cancer survivors do not maintain recommended levels of physical activity, and research into ongoing programs is limited. The Cancer Voices SA (CVSA) cycling team enables cancer survivors to exercise together, but differs from many

reported interventions: it is ongoing, it is run by cancer survivors, it attracts a high proportion of males, and cancer experience is not a prerequisite for joining.

METHOD

Data: semi-structured interviews (N=7), participant observation of two rides (N = 15), and naturalistic data (Facebook, AdelaideCyclists). Analysis: thematic analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cater for a variety of ability levels, e.g. by regrouping
- Encouragement assists new members to persevere
- Avoiding the 'support group' label reduces barriers
- Emphasize health benefits of exercise for survivors
- Having cancer survivor leaders normalizes survivorship
- Including people without cancer prevents survivors from feeling they must stop attending once well
- Exercise facilitates the exchange of support.