

Setting meaningful goals in the re-entry phase: a qualitative evaluation of a brief intervention for patients treated for melanoma or breast cancer

A. Visser¹, L. Post², J. Dekker^{3,4}, L. van Zuylen¹ and I. Konings¹

Background

Rationale: In the re-entry phase patients treated for cancer face existential concerns. Meaning-making may be used to deal with existential concerns. Meaning-making involves the use of existing sources of meaning, and a search for or use of new or adapted sources of meaning.

Research aim: We developed an intervention to support patients with this meaning-making process, with a focus on setting meaningful goals in the re-entry phase. The present pilot-study used a qualitative design to evaluate this intervention.

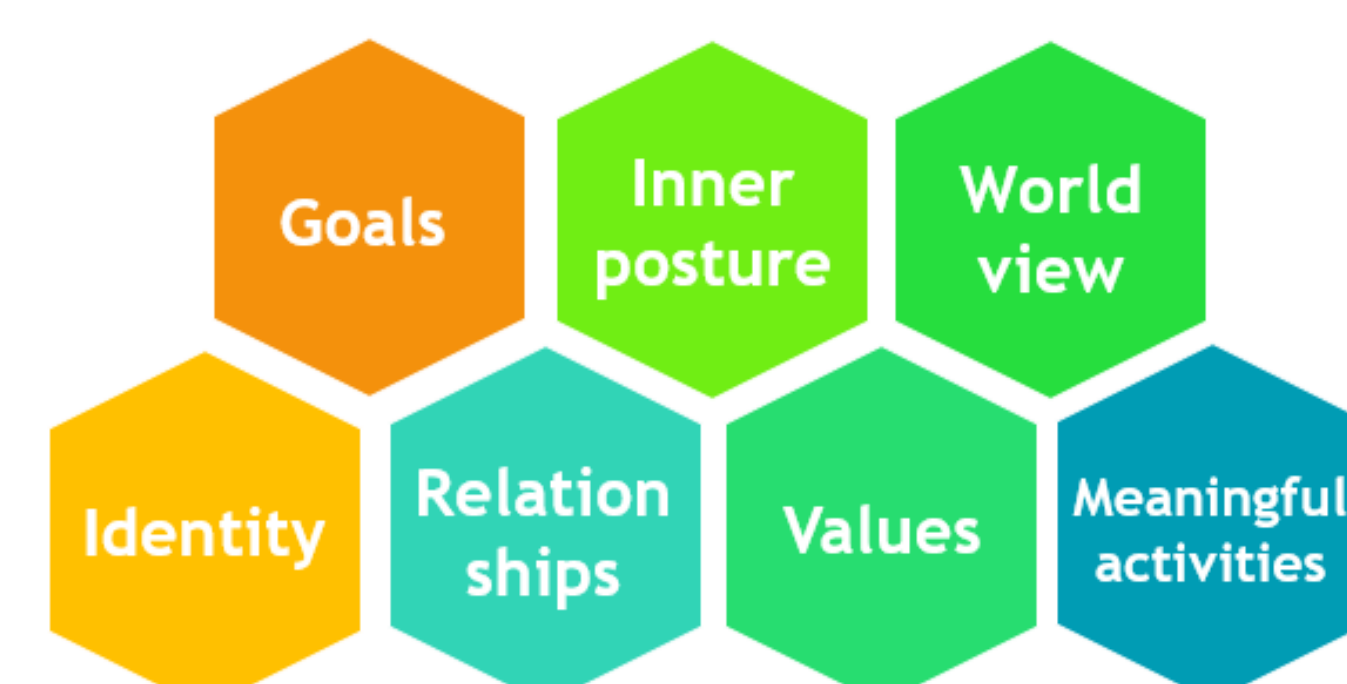


Methods

Inclusion: after finishing systemic treatment for breast cancer stage I-III or melanoma stage III.

Intervention: an one-hour conversation guided by a spiritual counsellor who explored patients' sources of meaning, in order to help patients to set meaningful goals for picking up life.

Evaluation: experience, appreciation and benefits of the intervention by means of a semi-structured interview post-intervention. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.



Sources of meaning explored during the intervention

Results

15 participants:

8 patients treated for melanoma
7 patients treated for breast cancer

Characteristics:

Mean number of months after treatment: 1.7
Mean age: 55.9 years

Evaluation: qualitative interviews demonstrated an overall positive experience and appreciation of the intervention. Patients reported several perceived benefits, see table 1.

Perceived benefits	Featured quotes
Reflection on existential concerns and sources of meaning	I think the conversation helped me think about certain issues, like how do I see the future? Am I still scared or not? – Female, 72yrs, melanoma
Validation of existing sources of meaning	That's what I learned from that conversation, that I just have a very clear list of what's important to me. – Female, 33 yrs, breast cancer
Insights regarding use of sources of meaning	During this conversation it became clear, that I am down-to-earth and able to relativize. So that allows me to give [the fact that my friends were not there for me] a place. – Male, 51yrs, melanoma
Motivation to pick up life	It's a boost, a push, like we're moving on again. – Male, 85yrs, melanoma
Setting priorities (in picking up life)	What I got out of it was, what is important to me, what do I want to focus on, and how do I want to deploy that – Female, 48 yrs, breast cancer
Goal-setting	No new goals, but just becoming aware of those goals again (..) the more often you express things and also put them in order, the easier it becomes to live by them. – Female, 33yrs, breast cancer
Undertaking specific action	[to show my gratitude for my friends] I then bought one of those breast cancer bracelets and stuff you know, so we all had the same bracelets – Female, 46yrs, breast cancer

Conclusion

- This pilot-study shows that an intervention for patients with cancer to set meaningful goals for the re-entry phase was positively experienced and well appreciated.
- It suggests that the intervention supported patients meaning-making process.
- A larger study (with an active control group) is needed to evaluate the benefits of this intervention.