Remote psycho-social professional mentoring: a feasibility project

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Abstract

Purpose
To identify if remote provision of professional supervision and education can assist in both enhancing skills and supporting psycho-social staff in their work with people with cancer.

Methods
Psycho-social staff (clinical psychologists, psychologists and social workers) in positions funded by Cancer Institute NSW were invited to participate in a pilot study evaluating access to supervision and education provided by an experienced clinical psychologist via videoconference and telephone on a monthly basis.

Group sessions were held via videoconference in which 3–5 participants (including a supervisor) met for two hours. The first hour was dedicated to educational presentations, in the second hour clinical issues were discussed. Each participant was allowed time to present and feedback was provided by both the supervisor and other members.

In addition to the group sessions, participants were offered individual monthly half-hour phone calls to discuss clinical issues with the clinical psychologist.

Results
Twenty-six staff were invited to participate in this project, twenty commenced. Six were unable to participate due to time constraints. Individual supervision by phone was offered to these participants and accepted by all.

Participants were asked to rate their confidence in dealing with a range of issues pre- and post-project. There were improvements in self-reported confidence in addressing a range of issues, both general and specific. In addition self-assessment of overall effectiveness in their current management of psychological distress from pre- to post-evaluation increased by 25%.

Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they felt that their knowledge was increased by attending these sessions/watching DVDs of videos, on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (totally). On average participants rated this increase as 7.33 (range = 5–10; median = 7). With regards to telephone supervision sessions, most (80%) of participants were very or extremely satisfied.

Conclusions
The overwhelming feedback indicated that this project was well received and that participants would be keen to continue participation. In fact, some of the participants have indicated how disappointed they were for the project to be completed and some have expressed anxiety about not receiving adequate supervision upon completion of the project. Videoconferencing appears to provide an innovative mode of delivery for supervision and peer review.

Acknowledgments
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Reference
Presenter

Louise Shepherd is a clinical psychologist with 10 years’ clinical experience, with a strong background in treating anxiety and mood disorders. Since January 2004 she has been working in psycho-oncology and developed a service for rural cancer patients via videoconferencing. In this project she worked closely with nurses in NEAHS and held monthly education/supervision sessions via video. Currently she is working part-time treating inpatients and outpatients at St Vincent’s hospital as well as running a private practice.