

Mindfulness and the MABCan Project

Rachel Ryves, Senior Research Assistant for the GP DAB and MABCan Projects – University of Southampton

The last session of the day was the MABCan project to relieve symptoms of distress, menopause and fear of recurrence of breast cancer. I have to say I was a little sceptical about this. I had not heard of 'Mindfulness' before and felt it was 'rather American'.

For others who do not know Mindfulness is (according to Wikipedia)

"The intentional, accepting and non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts and sensations occurring in the present moment.

The term "mindfulness" is derived from the Pali-term sati, "mindfulness", which is an essential element of Buddhist practice, including vipassana, satipaṭṭhāna and anapanasati.

Mindfulness practice is being employed in psychology to alleviate a variety of mental and physical conditions, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and in the prevention of relapse in depression and drug addiction. It has gained worldwide popularity as a distinctive method to handle emotions."

Its use currently was developed by Jon Kabat Zinn, and involves meditation training focusing on the self-regulation of emotions and "living in the moment". Rachel described it as the "moment to moment, non-judgemental, non-reactive awareness".

It is well documented that at least 50% of breast cancer patients experience some sort of emotional or distress problems at some point either during or after their treatment. CBT or psychotherapy can help, but what is needed is something that can be enduring and help patients long after their treatments are over.

The MAPCan trial is a qualitative study involving focus groups with patients being identified as having a score of at least 8 or more on an anxiety/depression scale.

Initial results from the focus groups show that there is good acceptance of the idea of doing a Mindfulness Course – even although it can be quite a commitment

- One session a week for 8 weeks
- A one day, 6 hour retreat
- 45 minutes home practice a day

There was a feeling among the women that it was giving them control of their feelings and motivation to take some of the aspects of the course into their everyday life.

The main reasons for not doing the course was not wanting to join a group of other cancer patients "I don't want to be associated with the ill" and "It has been sort of a club no one wants to belong to".

Some metastatic breast cancer patients expressed concerns about taking part in a course with other women at a different stage of their illness.

The next stage of the study is to continue with focus groups and face-to-face interviews with a view of setting up a course during 2015.

Having been sceptical at the start of the talk I felt by the end that certain aspects could well help some women come to terms with their condition and feel stronger. It is certainly a 'hot topic' of the time as a Google search shows a great number of Mindfulness Clinics appearing throughout the UK and a search on PubMed lists over 20 articles in the last two years.

Mairead MacKenzie

ICPV Member and Trustee, July 2014