Evaluation of a community-based vocational rehabilitation program for cancer survivors

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Background
Restoration of function and resumption of life roles such as work and community participation are important rehabilitation outcomes after cancer.

Aim
The study objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary vocational program on work ability and community integration for cancer survivors.

Methods
This was a retrospective cohort study involving patients enrolled in a vocational program at a community-based cancer rehabilitation centre. These patients were either employed (n= 56), on paid/unpaid leave (n=7) or seeking a new job (n=28). Primary outcome was perceived work ability measured by the Work Ability Index and secondary outcome was community reintegration assessed using the 3-point Modified Reintegration to Normal Living Index (mRNL). Descriptive analyses, paired-samples t-test and Cohen's *d* were calculated (two-tailed).

Results
Study sample (n= 91) was predominantly female (95%) diagnosed with breast cancer (74%), had a degree and higher level of education (51%) and a mean age of 54 ± 7.6 years. At 6-month review, returned to work rate increased by 23% with more patients being employed (n=77) and others were either self-employed (n=6), volunteering (n=2), or unemployed (n=7). Paired-samples t-test showed that mean perceived work ability at review (6.9 ± 1.5) was significantly higher than at baseline (5.7 ± 1.8), t (90) = 6.4, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 1.2 (95% CI [0.8, 1.6]). The improvement in perceived work ability from baseline to review was associated with a moderate-to-large effect, d = 0.7 (95% CI [0.4, 0.9]). Mean total mRNL score was also significantly higher at review (27.0 ± 5.5) than at baseline (25.5 ± 4.9), t (90) = 2.8, p = .006, with a mean difference of 1.5 (95% CI [0.4, 2.5]). The effect size was small to moderate, Cohen's d = 0.3 (95% CI [0.1, 0.5]).

Conclusion
Our findings underscore the importance of vocational rehabilitation for cancer survivors to improve their perceived ability to work and resume meaningful participation in their community.

Image(s):

Bibliographic references

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