Helping people to help themselves: an experiential eight-week mindfulness course for people living with a long-term inflammatory condition

PC-20
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Aim
Although people with inflammatory arthritis receive medication to control disease activity, many report a lack of support for the emotional and psychological difficulties associated with living with a long-term physical health condition. Many report hopelessness, isolation and powerlessness. These difficult issues are important to patients but often cannot be helped with medication. As caring health professionals, we wanted to improve how we support patients to deal with this ‘secondary suffering’; optimise their general health and wellbeing; and improve their self-efficacy and self-management skills. We felt helping people to develop mindfulness skills would help them to help themselves.

Methods
In a community setting we delivered a one-hour mindfulness awareness session for rheumatology patients; followed by an eight-week experiential mindfulness programme. This included two-hour weekly sessions plus home practice. There were 10 women and 1 man in the group.

We used the following pre and post-course patient reported outcome measures:

- Arthritis Research UK Musculoskeletal Health Questionnaire (MSK –HQ)
- Self-compassion Scale – Short Form (SCS-SF)
- Participant feedback questionnaire
- Participant focus group

Outcomes / Results
Results were encouraging:

- SCS-SF – 91% improved / 9% worsened
- MSK- HQ – 64% improved / 9% stayed the same / 27% worsened

Conclusions
This was a worthwhile innovative pilot project which was perceived by some participants as life changing. The course was well received by the participants and all completed the eight-week course. They appreciated the course was delivered out with the hospital setting which added to their feeling of self-efficacy and control, and facilitated self-management.

Participants went on to organise their own monthly self help group in the community.

Our feedback about the course was well received by the rheumatology multidisciplinary team in Ayrshire & Arran who would be keen for further mindfulness courses to be offered to people being managed within the rheumatology service.

Evidence suggests mindfulness can be helpful for managing the difficulties experienced by those living with a wide range of long-term conditions and can reduce reliance on health services (1). The participants felt it would be worthwhile offering this course to other people living with a long-term condition.

References
2. The mindfulness course was based on the ‘Mindfulness Scotland’ course handbook entitled ‘Mindfulness Approaches’ (2008).
3. £2,300 funding was provided by the Scottish Society for Rheumatology (SSR) for this project (2017)