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THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



Wellness Coaching Study Finds Long Term Benefits for Cancer Survivors

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

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Galloway Township, NJ- Life-saving cancer treatments have increased the number of cancer survivors living in the United States to nearly 12 million, yet the long-term side effects they often live with can significantly impact their health and quality of life.

New research published in the *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* and conducted by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, showed that Wellness Coaching, a relatively new type of health intervention, had significant, immediate, and lasting impact in reducing anxiety, depression, improving quality of life, and increasing other healthy lifestyle behaviors.

The American Cancer Society recommends survivors maintain a healthy weight and engage in healthy lifestyle habits to reduce risk of recurrence, mortality, and other chronic diseases, yet the majority do not, according to recent research. This study looked at the initial and longitudinal benefits that wellness coaching might have with cancer survivors.

Principle Investigator, Dr. Mary Lou Galantino, PT, PhD, MSCE, professor at Stockton College and Adjunct Research Scholar at University of Pennsylvania, said that it is the first research published utilizing this methodology as a single intervention, which has promising results and potential application in other areas.

Dr. Galantino said, "We certainly need randomized, controlled trials to confirm our findings, but we are excited about our initial results."

The idea to apply this methodology to cancer survivorship came in 2004, when wellness coach and fitness professional, Pam Schmid was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was a leader in the new field of wellness coaching and recognized the wide reaching benefits coaching might offer survivors, after struggling personally with the challenges treatment brought her way.

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Stockton Cancer Research/ page 2

Pam Schmid said, "Being a professional, I knew what I needed to do to be healthy and feel my best, yet so many obstacles came my way. I watched others struggle and saw no real support for them. Some health behaviors can reduce risk of recurrence or dying of their cancer as much as 50%. It's critical to support survivors to do the things they *can* do to not only improve their risks but to improve their quality of life."

In this observational cohort study of 30 breast, prostate, and colorectal cancer survivors, participants received six coaching sessions over a three month period. They were followed for a year after the intervention to evaluate the sustainability of changes through the wellness coaching. Wellness coaches are credentialed professionals who are trained and certified as coaches.

In this study, a fitness professional certified as an ACSM (American College of Sports Medicine) Health Fitness Instructor and Wellness Coach (through Wellcoaches Corporation -in partnership with ACSM) served as the coach.

Participants were coached in three different states via telephone. Survivors reported in questionnaires that they increased their fruit and vegetable consumption, increased their physical activity and had a reduction in weight and BMI that was sustained one year after the intervention ended. The most helpful aspect reported was the motivation and feedback they received as they worked towards their goals.

- All sessions were conducted by phone
- Agenda/goals were client directed
- Survivors developed a wellness vision and 3 month goals
- Follow-up sessions supported consistent progress towards their vision/goals
- Expertise was given in a "just-in-time" method only as needed
- Utilized a strength-based approach

Wellness coaching moves people from point A to B says Schmid, "Instead of being stuck, they have a partner to start moving ahead to be their best. As one survivor told me, 'This is not like anything I've experienced. It's given me a pathway out ... I need to move forward to do the things I know I need to do to be my best'." Schmid is continuing her work with survivors and cancer centers through her Healthy and Fit After Cancer® programs.

The field of coaching is gaining academic credibility as the Institute of Coaching at Harvard was founded in 2009 to create a scientific foundation for coaching psychology, which will create standards for measuring coaching outcomes.

Coaching focuses on building self-efficacy and autonomy from a strength-based approach that encourages the individual to think about what is going well, where they have been successful in the past, and what will support success in the future and is delivered using a number of tools from evidence based domains/theories such as positive psychology, motivational interviewing, and appreciative inquiry.

For more information, please contact Pam Schmid at HFACstudy@gmail.com. For more details on the study, please visit <http://www.healthyandfitaftercancer.com>.

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