

Take Charge: Recharge (Tackling Fatigue)

Donna Bruce, Specialist Occupational Therapist &
Scott Watson, Rehabilitation Support Worker
St Andrew's Hospice, Lanarkshire



Introduction

Fatigue can be described as the lack of energy and motivation (both physical and mental)¹. This is not the same thing as drowsiness, a term that describes the need to sleep.

In some chronic conditions, fatigue is reported by individuals to be one of their worst symptoms, having a key impact on their quality of life and ability to function. Despite being rated as an important symptom by up to 80% of patients, it is often a neglected component in the management of chronic conditions¹.

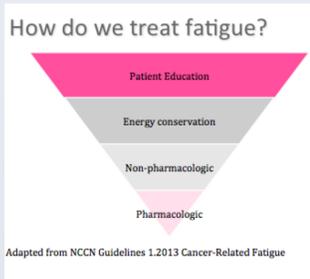
There are very few drug treatments available for fatigue, however there are a number of strategies that can be used to help manage it. These strategies aim to enable people to feel more in control of their symptoms.

By encouraging people to *recharge* they can *take charge*!

Aims, Objectives & Goals

The aim of the programme is to educate people in self management of the symptoms of fatigue. These symptoms can have a significant impact on functional ability. Therefore education around how energy levels can be managed enables people to engage in daily tasks with more ease, thus improving quality of life. With an improved quality of life it is envisaged that this would reduce visits to the GP, hospital admissions and decrease need for long term care.

With the adequate knowledge, people are empowered to manage their own symptoms thus allowing them "to live longer healthier lives at home or in a homely setting" (Scottish Government 20/20 vision, 2011²)



Method

A pilot study was carried out which measured the outcomes for patients who had attended the Fatigue Management programme. The first part of the pilot involved an initial individual assessment carried out by the OT and then the development of a one to one person centred treatment plan for managing fatigue symptoms. 10 patients took part in the pilot, all of whom had a life limiting illness including MS, cancer and Parkinson's.

After reviewing the pilot group, it was identified that there was significant interest in the topic and continuing with one to one input, although beneficial, would be unsustainable. Therefore a class based education session was developed and a measurable functional assessment undertaken by the Occupational Therapist (OT). The classes were then led by our Rehabilitation Support Worker and open to all adults living in Lanarkshire with a life-limiting condition. The session consists of one 1 hour session in small groups which teaches the concept of energy conservation in managing fatigue.

Attendees were introduced to different self-management tools which included activity diaries. The attendees could complete this on their own at home or they could be supported by the Occupational Therapist, either by telephone, e-mail or a return appointment.

Attendees were asked to complete a feedback form in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the session's content and also to identify if they had any additional needs.

Anyone identifying or being identified as having continuing needs in relation to fatigue management received a follow up one to one session with the OT.

Results



Attendees suggested the following to improve the session:

- Information for carers
- Able to access class early in their journey
- Information for workplace/employers

Jo's Story

I moved to Scotland from England last year. I saw a neurologist and an MS Nurse who referred me to St Andrew's Hospice. The referral happened at exactly the right time as we had just settled into our home.

I then started to think about the classes I could go to and the treatment I could receive. I attend the Strength & Balance and Fatigue Management classes at the Hospice. Fatigue Management has been very good for me because I feel exhausted all the time. The class taught me that you only have so much energy during the day and I've learned how to use it. I hadn't realised there was a way of dealing with it that would make things easier for me. In the past, I felt guilty about not being able to do as much [around the house] as I used to but now I know I have a smaller amount of energy, I do smaller and more manageable jobs. I've been able to share what I've learned in the Fatigue Management class with my husband and now I don't feel as guilty when I'm tired or don't have as much energy as I used to.

I really like the exercise class too because you always focus on the things you can't do but the class taught me the simple things you can do – even from sitting in a chair. It showed me how little I was doing before because my muscles ached (in a good way!) afterwards. It allowed me to see what muscles I could still exercise. I found that really helpful.

I would like to continue attending classes at St Andrew's Hospice because I really like the staff here and find them really helpful. I love the environment, it's very nurturing.

It's been really beneficial for me. Since I had to give up work, I felt like I had become more insular and [coming to the Hospice] gave me the opportunity to socialise and meet new people, as well as receive treatments. I've found it to be a very positive and valuable experience.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the patient feedback indicates clear benefits from having education in Fatigue Management. The Scottish Government are keen to promote a supported self-management approach to enable people living with a long term condition to take charge of managing their own health. This education session delivered to patients at St Andrew's Hospice encourages people to adopt coping strategies with fatigue by promoting the principle of 'Take charge, Recharge'.

Through the user evaluation forms it was also highlighted that people felt it would be beneficial to provide education on a wider scale, therefore we developed a hand-out for patients to take away. We have also met with workplaces and carried out work place visits to ensure that people are better supported to continue with employment. Patients also indicated that information would be most useful in the earlier stages of diagnosis, therefore the next phase would be to target primary care providers to make them more aware of the service and increase referrals.

We continually reflect on feedback from patients and have recently changed the format of the sessions to be more open and discussion based as opposed to the previous slide show.

Due to the success of this pilot study, St Andrew's Hospice now delivers Fatigue Management on a monthly basis and has also incorporated it into both Inpatient and Outpatient Services.

"Self-management is critical for the Scottish Government's Quality Strategy, which sets out a 2020 Vision for a safe, effective and person-centred health service." Scottish Government (2016).⁴



References

1. *Managing fatigue in patients with chronic conditions in primary care*; Family Practice (2013) Volume 30, Issue 2, Pages 123–124
2. *2020 Vision*, Scottish government (2011)
3. *Cancer Related Fatigue*, NCCN Guidelines (2013)
4. *Quality strategy*, Scottish Government (2016)

Thank you to 'Jo' for sharing her story.

Contact: donna-marie.bruce@standrews.scot.nhs.uk