

CHAPTER 12

Illness Intrusiveness and Social Support in Gay and Bisexual Men with Prostate Cancer

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

Although the literature on gay and bisexual men (GBM) living with prostate cancer has grown in recent years, little is known about the influence of social support and relationship status on illness adjustment in this group of men. The Illness Intrusiveness Theoretical Framework posits that the context of chronic illness, such as disease-related, treatment-related, and social factors, can either exacerbate or ameliorate the disruption of patients' valued life activities. Using this framework, our study examined the relationship between positive social support and three domains of illness intrusiveness (relationships and personal development, sex and intimacy, and instrumental areas such as health, employment, and active recreation). Additionally, we examined how the association between social support and illness intrusiveness was affected by relationship status (i.e., being partnered or unpartnered). This cross-sectional research project recruited 92 self-identified GBM from the online community and from local community centers that serve GBM. Participants completed a self-report packet of questionnaires online. Results showed that unpartnered (versus partnered) men reported less positive social support. We found that for unpartnered men, reporting greater positive social support was associated with less illness intrusiveness in two areas of their lives: relationships and personal development, as well as instrumental areas (health, finance, recreation). However, greater positive social support was not associated with reduced illness intrusiveness in partnered men. Although our findings cannot tell us whether positive support causes less illness intrusiveness, these data suggest that unpartnered GBM with prostate

cancer seem to benefit from greater levels of positive social support. Healthcare providers need to assess the availability of instrumental and emotional support for unpartnered GBM, and they should be prepared to offer resources and to facilitate positive support.

KEY TERMS

illness intrusiveness, Illness Intrusiveness Theoretical Framework, positive social support, relationship status

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