

Pace Heart Life Skills Project

The project aimed to develop an internet resource providing a gateway to information on heart health and coronary heart disease, and related health matters. Such health matters included information on how to manage physical and emotional symptoms to prevent future cardiac problems. The gateway was created to be used by general practitioners to manage depression in patients with established coronary heart disease.



The project was conducted in 2005-2006 and was a result of collaboration between researchers from the Faculty of IT and School of Primary Health Care, Monash University.

About the project

Background

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is the leading cause of death in Australia and a leading cause of disability among older people. Psychosocial factors, particularly depression and poor social support, impede prognosis and increase risk of death among people with CHD.

The study aimed to develop an internet resource which general practitioners (GPs) could use to manage depression in patients with established CHD. Based on information gathered from focus groups with patients with CHD and depression, an internet-based program was developed. The program aimed to enable patients and GPs to easily retrieve resources based upon the risk profiles and other characteristics of each patient. It also provided education about the impact of lifestyle and psychological factors on heart health and strategies to improve CHD risk factors.

Project hypothesis

It was hypothesised that high levels of depression and low social support would be related to decreased heart rate variability (HRV) and baroreflex sensitivity. It was also hypothesised that decreases in depression and increases social support, after intervention, would predict increases in HRV and baroreflex sensitivity. It was also hypothesised that computerised psychosocial intervention plus usual care, delivered by GPs, would lead to greater improvements in psychosocial measures and absolute CVD risk, compared to usual care alone.

Research funding

Funded by Medical Faculty Small Grant Schema (\$75,000)

Research methods

- Focus groups with the patients suffering from coronary heart disease
- GP interviews and consultations

People

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Dr Pier is a Lecturer in Psychology at Deakin University, Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of General Practice, Monash University and registered probationary psychologist. She is also an associate member of the Australian Psychological Society and member of the Australian Association of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and the Monash University E-therapy Unit.

Former Partner Investigator:

Professor Jeff Richards (PhD, M. Psychol, BA (Hons), FAPS)

School of Primary Health Care, Department of General practice, Monash University

Jeff had a background in clinical and health psychology. His areas of research specialty were primary health care, behavioural medicine, anxiety and mood disorders, cardiovascular health, and use of information technology in health and mental health. Jeff had a strong track record in Primary Care research along with numerous publications in leading international and national journals. He received international recognition for his development of an internet based treatment program (PANIC ONLINE) for panic disorder, which was the first of its kind in Australia. The development and pilot evaluation of that program were supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund and engendered considerable national and international interest.

Project progress

Project conduction

2005-2006

Project outcomes

The main outcome was development of an Internet-based heart health program (Pace Heart Lifeskills; PHL) that provided education about the impact of lifestyle and psychological factors on heart health and strategies to improve CHD risk factors. The program was based on established tenets of CBT and social learning theory. We accumulated considerable pilot data from employees of a global energy company, which used PHL. Participants' scores on depression, social support, anxiety, stress and several indices of anger significantly improved, and those changes were maintained three months later.

The project findings contributed to the related follow on project [Heart Health Online](#) funded by [Beyond Blue](#), which aims to assist general practitioners to manage depression and related illnesses, in people with established coronary heart disease.

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Contact us

If you have any questions, comments or feedback about the Pace Heart Life Skills project, please contact [Dr Frada Burstein](#).

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