

# Fear of Cancer Recurrence: Strategies for Adaptive Coping



**Shelley A. Johns**, PsyD, HSPP, ABPP

Board Certified Clinical Health Psychologist

Assistant Professor, IU School of Medicine

Research Scientist, Regenstrief Institute

Affiliate Faculty, Fairbanks Center for Medical Ethics

Associate Member, Cancer Prevention/Control, IUSCC

# Agenda

- Defining fear of cancer recurrence (FCR)
- Significance of the problem
- Assessing YOUR fear
- Strategies for adaptive coping
  - Mindfulness
  - Values-based action



# Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR)

Lebel et al, 2016

“Fear, worry, or concern about cancer returning or progressing.”



# Significance

- **Prevalence**

- Mild/transient FCR is almost *universal*.
- 40-70% of survivors report *clinically significant FCR* (Thewes et al., 2012; NCCN Survivorship Guidelines, 2015).



- **Trajectory**

- FCR remains stable over the survivorship trajectory, even when risk of recurrence is low (Simard et al., 2013).

- **Unmet need**

- FCR is the most frequently endorsed unmet supportive care need among survivors (Armes et al., 2009; Harrison et al., 2011; Hodgkinson et al., 2007).

# Higher FCR Is Associated With...

- Younger age
- Children still at home
- Number/severity of symptoms
- Medical comorbidities
- Lower quality of life
- Higher perceived risk of recurrence
- Need for more support
- More healthcare visits



- Positive health behavior **change** (e.g., healthier diet, sunscreen use, avoiding tobacco, continuation of treatment)

# Health Service Usage Among Survivors

- High FCR is associated with excessive threat monitoring:
  - Hyper-vigilant self-examination
  - Requests for unnecessary scans
  - Greater number of unscheduled outpatient medical visits
  - Greater number of ER/ED visits
  - Greater use of counseling, support groups, and CAM interventions
  - Higher health care costs
- High FCR is also associated with avoidant coping:
  - Of cancer screening, regular check-ups, and other medical tests
  - May compromise health outcomes.



# Experiential Exercise #1

## Assessing YOUR Fear with FCR-7



# FCR-7 Scoring

- Add scores for each of the 7 questions.

	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	A lot	All the time
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am afraid that my cancer may recur.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Total scores  $\geq 17$  = “clinically significant” fear.
- Total scores  $\geq 27$  = “severe” fear.

**Support is available!**



# Adaptive Coping Strategies

## **MINDFULNESS**

- Present-moment awareness
- Noticing/untangling from internal barriers
- Strengthening your resilient self

## **VALUES-BASED ACTION**

- Defining your values
- Mindfully engaging in values-based actions
- Using values as a guide to daily behavior

# Experiential Exercise #2



# Experiential Exercise #3



# Experiential Exercise #4



## Values-Based Actions

Brainstorm as many as you can

## Specific Actions

Using your ideas above, develop 3 SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to increase consistent living with one core value.

Week 1 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Core Value: \_\_\_\_\_

1.

2.

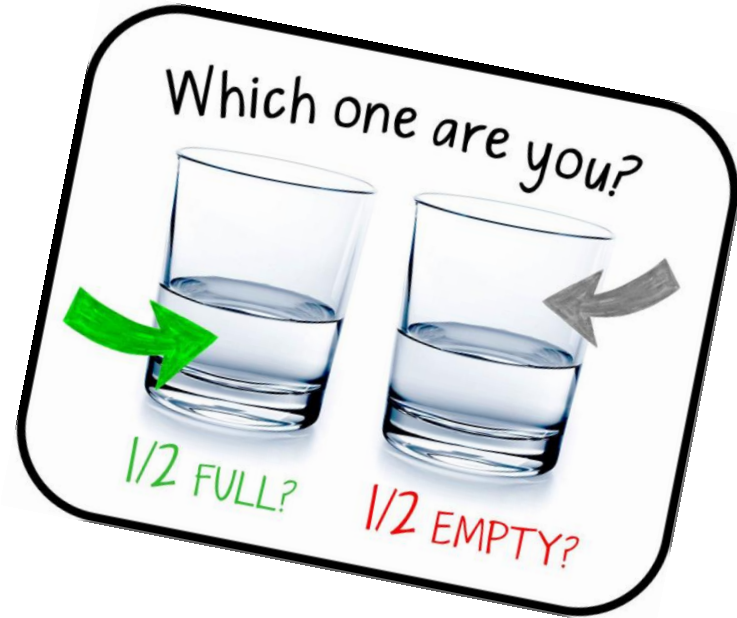
3.

## Possible Barriers

# “Experiential” Exercise #5



# Protective Factors



# Opportunities

- **Healthy IU**

- <https://healthy.iu.edu/>
- Mindfulness, resiliency, fitness, nutrition counseling, caregiver support, etc...

- **Eskenazi Health**

- Fear of Recurrence 4-week Resiliency course - next offering in June!
- See flier for details – email [sheljohn@iu.edu](mailto:sheljohn@iu.edu)

- **IU Simon Cancer Center**

- “First Mondays” support groups – call 317-944-0301

- **Cancer Support Community**

- <http://cancersupportindy.org/>

- **CANCERcare®**

- <https://www.cancercaare.org/>



# Experiential Exercise #6







**THANK YOU**

To **YOU** for your participation.

To **Healthy IU** for caring about cancer survivors.