

## SELF-MANAGEMENT OF LUTS: EXPLORING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES MADE BY OLDER WOMEN FOLLOWING A CONTINENCE PROMOTION WORKSHOP INTERVENTION.

### Hypothesis / aims of study

This study aims to explore the nature and mechanisms of behavioural changes made by community living older women following attendance at a bladder health and continence promotion workshop to support self-management and reduce severity of lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS). Significant improvements in continence status were previously shown among women who attended the bladder health and continence workshops<sup>1</sup>. The study reported here aims to explore the response to the workshop of women with LUTS and little or no urine leakage in order to understand how older women are motivated to make changes to improve their bladder health.

### Study design, materials and methods

The qualitative study was a sub-study conducted among ineligible participants of a larger cluster randomised controlled trial that sought to include only women with at least weekly urinary incontinence<sup>1</sup>. Participants in this study were women aged 60 years and over who self-reported LUTS with less than once weekly urinary leakage and who had not previously sought healthcare for urinary problems. The women received one of three interventions according to the cluster randomisation of the larger trial (clusters were the community organisations each woman belonged to): 1.) educational workshop on bladder health 2) general self-management workshop 3) combined workshop on bladder health and self-management. The women in the general self-management and combined workshop (groups 2 and 3) also received a self-help booklet on LUTS tailored to the particular symptoms they reported.

To capture the older women's experiences of undertaking self-management of LUTS and the continence workshop, qualitative telephone interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sub-sample of 20 participants who provided informed consent. The nature and mechanisms of behaviour changes reported by the women were explored in a thematic analysis undertaken with the support of NVivo 10 software.

### Results

Twenty individual telephone interviews were conducted from the 65 women who completed the study (31%). Seven of 20 educational workshop attendees (group 1), 5 of 24 general self-management workshop attendees (group 2) and 8 of 21 combined workshop attendees.

*Views about workshops-style interventions:* All respondents believed the workshop interventions were worthwhile and helpful and stated they would recommend attendance to others. No interviewee felt the workshops to be a waste of time. The group format was universally liked and believed to be suitable for presenting information about bladder health and continence promotion, however nondisclosure and the need to maintain privacy, particularly where group members knew each other, was highlighted as essential. Some women believed that fear of having to discuss personal bladder issues was a key reason for non-attendance by others.

Only one difference was noted between the groups: Educational workshop respondents (Group 1) described having difficulties remembering all the details of the workshop and stated that they would have liked follow-up written information to refer to. Respondents in the self-management (Group 2) and combined (Group 3) workshop groups confirmed the benefits of receiving tailored printed information for their LUTS self-management. Those attending the educational workshop (Group 1) did not receive printed follow-up information tailored to their reported LUTS, unlike the self-management (group 2) and combined workshop groups (group 3) who did.

*Impact of workshop attendance:* All respondents reported changing their behaviour following the workshop intervention and all noted symptom improvement, however the degree of improvements reported varied between the respondents. Reported symptom improvements predominantly focussed on reduced urgency and nocturia. The impact of individual improvements for the older woman was described in terms of changes to their everyday living and perceived enhancements in their quality of life. Specific benefits they reported included the ability to make long journeys, go shopping, and have days out without needing to map toilets beforehand; improved sleep and improved choice of clothing. Respondents also noted that being able to talk about bladder health and bladder problems was useful and enabled them to understand how common bladder problems are.

*Mechanisms of behavioural changes:* exploring mechanisms of behavioural changes among older women attending continence promotion workshops identified three reciprocal and inter-related themes to explain the process of self-managing:

1. The women underwent a process of *becoming aware* that the changes they were experiencing are symptoms of potential bladder problems and are not an inevitable part of normal ageing. Many older women did not recognise that their bladder function had changed until they heard about LUTS at the workshop and realised that their experiences were similar.
2. The process of *personalising the message* involved the older women applying what they had heard and learned to their own situation and was important in enabling them to believe that behavioural changes they made could improve their current symptoms and prevent deterioration for the future, an area of concern for them.
3. In the process of *taking control* the older women chose what they wanted to work on, selecting specific activities and techniques learned during the workshop that addressed their individual situation and priorities. This could be performing pelvic floor muscle exercises, bladder training using specific distraction strategies, making changes to fluid intake and so forth, but the decisions and

activities undertaken were made by the older woman, who also self-monitored and adjusted her behaviour to attain the targeted effects.

#### Interpretation of results

The findings from this qualitative study suggest that a single workshop-style intervention, combining education on bladder health and self-management techniques with follow up tailored information, is perceived as beneficial by community living older women enabling them to successfully self-manage their bladder health, reduce their LUTS and improve their perceived quality of living. The group format is suitable to raise awareness of LUTS as symptoms, not a part of normal ageing and to highlight specific techniques which can be mastered and selected to target particular LUTS and individual circumstances. This allows better bladder control to be gained and sustained, because learned techniques and skills can be used whenever necessary.

#### Concluding message

Community living older women successfully learn to self-manage their LUTS through a process of becoming aware, personalising the message and taking control of their bladder condition following attendance at a continence promotion workshop, combining bladder health and self-management education with tailored written information.

#### References

1. Tannenbaum, C., Agnew, R., Benedetti, A., Thomas, D. and Van den Heuvel, E. (2013) 'Effectiveness of continence promotion for older women via community organisations: a cluster randomised trial'. *BMJ Open*, 3 (12)

#### Disclosures

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