

Lay summary

Title: Prostate Cancer and the Impact on Couples; a qualitative metasynthesis.

Main findings:

The impact of prostate cancer and its management affects both members of the couple, their lives, identity and relationship.

Tailored information and support that is relevant to the impact that prostate cancer and the side effects of treatment pose to relationships is needed.

What was the question?

To explore what is already known in the scientific literature regarding the experiences of couples affected by prostate cancer.

What did we do?

We searched the scientific literature to find research articles that explored the impact of having a prostate cancer (PCa) diagnosis on couples. From this, we found 37 articles. We looked at these articles in depth for common themes across these articles.

What did we find?

A common theme from the articles we looked at was the challenges couples faced relating to sexual intimacy. Due to one of the side effects of treatment causing erectile dysfunction, some couples found it difficult to maintain intimacy in the relationship and engaged in other practices to preserve their relationship (kissing, hugging, use of sexual aids/toys). Couples engaged in various strategies to help them move forward as a couple. Some of these strategies included acceptance of changes to their relationships, reassurance and using laughter as a way to get through their experience, and openly communicating with one another. Sometimes couples chose not to tell one another how they were truly feeling to protect their partner from further upset. Some couples commonly avoided communication about their feelings to their partner and sometimes led to conflict in the relationship. Partners were considered crucial to the man with PCa's recovery of health and provided emotional and practical support. However this sometimes led to partners neglecting their own health to tend to the needs of the man with PCa. Partners often felt unable to express their concerns or feelings in healthcare consultations that they attended with the man with PCa and sometimes felt they were not included. Couples sometimes felt that the experience of PCa brought them closer together as the impact of illness and its management affects both members of the couple.

What does this mean?

Health professionals need to be aware that PCa impact on both the man with PCa and their partner and therefore ensure both members of the couple are included when directing support services that may be useful for them to move forward together.

Information and support needs to be tailored to the needs of the couple, in particular self-management strategies for couples relating to the impact of PCa and side effects of treatment on their relationship.