Men’s perceptions of the impact of the physical consequences of a radical prostatectomy on their quality of life: a qualitative systematic review

Deborah Edwards MPhil and Judith Carrier PhD
School of Healthcare Sciences, The Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

A qualitative systematic review was carried out to identify men’s perceptions of the impact of the physical consequences of a radical prostatectomy on their quality of life (QOL). The review included men of all ages and nationalities who had radicalized prostatectomy as treatment for all stages of prostate cancer. Inclusion criteria were studies that investigated the physical consequences of radicalized prostatectomy and its impact on QOL and life experience as identified by the men and the psychosocial implications of the identified physical consequences of radicalized prostatectomy as identified by the men. A search across six databases aimed to find English language studies (November 2017). Critical appraisal was conducted using the Joanna Briggs Institute critical appraisal instrument for qualitative studies. Nineteen qualitative studies were included and the findings are presented as five aggregated qualitative syntheses.

Urinary incontinence and erectile dysfunction are significant side-effects of radicalized prostatectomy that have a negative impact on men’s QOL for which they feel ill prepared. Men are often reluctant to discuss their emotions and therefore the need to create suitable opportunities for them to express their feelings in conjunction with appropriate evidence-based emotional support and advice is pivotal to the development of support interventions. This review highlights the importance of men being made aware of the impact the physical effects that radicalized prostatectomy can have on their QOL and that those who select radicalized prostatectomy as a treatment strategy must be provided with appropriate information and support from healthcare professionals.

Key words: continence, erectile dysfunction, experience, quality of life, radical prostatectomy, sexuality

Int J Evid Based Healthc 2019; 17:S41–S42.

Background

Prostate cancer is the most common male cancer and second most common cause of cancer death in men in the Western world. The quality of life (QOL) of men with prostate cancer can be negatively affected by the various treatments available to them. Radical prostatectomy predominates as the primary treatment approach for prostate cancer in a number of countries including Australia and North America, and involves the complete removal of the prostate, seminal vesicles and surrounding tissues. Postoperative complications commonly occur and the literature reports issues concerning bladder, bowel and sexual dysfunction. These physical consequences of surgery are intrinsically connected to psychosocial implications for the patient and are associated with significantly reduced QOL or life experience. Nurses provide a vital role in ensuring that men are adequately prepared for a radicalized prostatectomy and the potential postoperative QOL implications. An improved understanding of the men’s perspective of these physical consequences could potentially enhance the value and impact of support provided. We therefore conducted a systematic review to explore the repercussions on lifestyle and associated psychosocial impact that the physical consequences outlined have on men, following a radicalized prostatectomy.

Methods

The review was conducted using Joanna Briggs Institute methods and including establishing the confidence of
the final synthesized findings according to the ConQual approach.

Results/Discussion
There were 7219 citations identified from database searches and after the duplicates had been removed the titles and abstracts of 4852 citations were reviewed. Based on the study eligibility criteria, 4807 citations were deemed not relevant. Forty-five full-text articles were retrieved and screened and 19 articles that met the inclusion criteria went forward to critical appraisal. No studies were excluded on critical appraisal and studies scored between 5 and 10 (the highest score possible). Two hundred and thirty-nine findings led to 20 categories and five syntheses statements. Synthesis 1 (ConQualLow) demonstrates that urinary incontinence is a significant problem for which men feel ill prepared, particularly at the point of catheter removal when the extent of the incontinence was a shock. For many this caused feelings of powerlessness and negatively impacted on social life and life experience. This review found that erectile dysfunction has a significant impact on men's life experience post radicalized prostatectomy as shown in synthesis 2 (ConQualLow), affecting sexuality and masculinity. It was shown through synthesis 3 (ConQualModerate) that despite the often negative implications of urinary incontinence and erectile dysfunction post radicalized prostatectomy, men recognized the need for adaptation and in some cases had adjusted their lifestyle accordingly. Acceptance of penile length shortening, loss of sexual intimacy, erectile dysfunction and urinary incontinence after radicalized prostatectomy was demonstrated in a number of ways and included reconciliation, adaptation and compensation for being rid of the cancer. Some men felt that the change in sexual function as a result of erectile dysfunction was natural and would have occurred anyway with their advancing age and that it was not necessarily related to the cancer. The impact of radicalized prostatectomy on men's relationships with their partners post radicalized prostatectomy was the essence of synthesis 4 (ConQualLow). This synthesis highlighted both the negative impact erectile dysfunction could have on relationships with a reluctance to communicate thoughts and worries to partners, but also the importance of identifying different ways of establishing a sexual relationship that could still be enjoyable despite erectile dysfunction. Synthesis 5 (ConQualLow) identified that support was perceived by the men to be essential to enable them to deal with the physical impact of radicalized prostatectomy on their QOL.

Conclusion
Overall this systematic review has demonstrated that the postoperative complications of urinary incontinence and erectile dysfunction that occur after a radicalized prostatectomy are significant side-effects of radicalized prostatectomy that have a negative impact on men's QOL for which they feel ill prepared. This review also showed that both physical and psychosocial support is essential. Men are often reluctant to discuss their emotions and therefore the need to create suitable opportunities for them to express their feelings in conjunction with appropriate evidence-based emotional support and advice is pivotal to the development of support interventions. In some cases, the men were able to demonstrate successful adaptation and become reconciled to a new life experience. Without an in depth understanding of the physical consequences of radicalized prostatectomy and the impact this can have both physically and psychologically, healthcare professionals (HCPs) are limited in their ability to provide the high level of individualized support these men require. This review highlights the importance of men being made aware of the impact the physical effects that radicalized prostatectomy can have on their QOL and that those who select radicalized prostatectomy as a treatment strategy must be provided with appropriate information and support from HCPs.

Acknowledgements
Conflicts of interest
The authors report no conflicts of interest.

References