

# A Feasibility Study of an Uncertainty Management Intervention for Patient–Partner Dyads Experiencing Breast Cancer

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**OBJECTIVES:** To examine the feasibility, acceptability, and effects of a dyad-based uncertainty management intervention for breast cancer, including tailored information and coping skills training.

**SAMPLE & SETTING:** 16 patient–partner dyads experiencing breast cancer were enrolled from a midwestern comprehensive cancer center.

**METHODS & VARIABLES:** A single-group pre-/post-test design was used, and descriptive statistics and Cohen's *d* were calculated. Measures were completed before the intervention and during each treatment cycle. Feasibility, acceptability, fidelity, uptake, and outcome variables (uncertainty, dyadic coping, family functioning) were included.

**RESULTS:** 16 dyads were enrolled during a 13-month period; 15 dyads completed the training for the study, and 13 dyads completed all study activities. Overall, participants reported satisfaction with the intervention. Small to medium effect sizes were observed across the outcomes.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING:** This study highlights the need for nurses to help couples manage uncertainty related to new cancer treatment. Tailored interventions can allow nurses to use their time efficiently by focusing on individuals' actual needs.

**KEYWORDS** patient–partner dyads; uncertainty management; intervention; breast cancer; feasibility

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Patients may experience multiple psychosocial responses while undergoing treatment for breast cancer, including uncertainty. Uncertainty is the inability to determine the meaning of illness-related experiences, such as cancer diagnoses, treatment options, side effects, and healthcare environments, because of the random, complex, and unpredictable nature of illness (Mishel, 1981, 1988). Uncertainty has been associated with negative outcomes in patients with breast cancer, including emotional distress, poor psychological adjustment, diminished quality of life, and symptom burden (Ahadzadeh & Sharif, 2018; Hall et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Knopf, 2007; Sammarco, 2001). Unrelieved uncertainty can increase the need for emergency care (Rising et al., 2016, 2019).

Uncertainty mutually influences the patient–partner dyad and can affect dyadic coping. The physical and emotional support of partners is important to patients' physical recovery and psychological functioning (Hilton et al., 2000; Zahlis & Lewis, 2010; Zimmerman, 2015). According to Northouse et al. (1995), partners experience slightly greater uncertainty but receive less support than patients with breast cancer. Partners with unrelieved uncertainty have reported decreased psychosocial well-being and quality of life, diminished dyadic coping, and altered family functioning (Northouse et al., 1998; Rolland, 2005; Senatore, 2013; Song et al., 2011, 2012). Challenges of a cancer diagnosis and treatment may also threaten reciprocal support, joint problem solving, and emotional strategies that are necessary for effective dyadic coping (Rottmann et al., 2015; Traa et al., 2015). Changes in the patient–partner dynamic can affect the entire family system (Friedman et al., 2003). Cancer often disrupts the daily routines of families, as