AbSPORU
Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit



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Project Title:
Development of a Community-Based Sleep Treatment Education Program for Cancer Survivors: The WellSleep Education Program Study

ABOUT JOSHUA

Joshua Tulk is a PhD student in Clinical Psychology training in the Behavioural Medicine lab at the University of Calgary. His doctoral dissertation is focused on the development of informational supportive programs to support cancer-related sleep disturbances. Josh previously completed a BSc (Hons.) in Psychology at Memorial University (2021) and an MSc in Clinical Psychology from University of Calgary (2025). He is broadly interested in health psychology, specifically focusing on psychosocial oncology, behavioural sleep medicine, health economics, and public health. He is also interested in learning more about chronic illness management and behavioural medicine. In the Behavioural Medicine Lab, Josh frequently collaborates across studies ranging from cancer to cardiac rehabilitation to metascience. Outside the lab, Josh enjoys reading, studying history and culture, being outdoors, and volunteering in the community.

PROJECT SUMMARY

On average, 70% of people diagnosed with cancer also experience trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling sleepy during the day because of their diagnosis and treatment, which can also contribute to depression, anxiety, memory, concentration problems, poor quality of life, and high financial burden. Education regarding sleep and helpful tips can drastically reduce symptom burden. However, people

with cancer may not be able to access these programs. In Canada, less than 20% of people with cancer receive evidence-based support for their sleep problems. Currently, there is only one publicly funded sleep treatment program in Alberta (in Edmonton) and five private sleep specialists in the province (one with experience treating people with cancer). More importantly, there are no active, established cancer-specific programs for sleep problems in Alberta. Infrequent educational offerings provided by sleep experts have yet to be evaluated for their impact on risk factors for sleep problems. Most people with cancer endorse the need for new programs to support the sleep of this population, including nearly 60% endorsing community-based informational support through an organization such as Wellspring Alberta. We are currently developing the WellSleep program with Wellspring, a 4-session psychoeducational program based on cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia to reduce dysfunctional beliefs about sleep, reduce sleep disturbance, and improve patient self-efficacy to manage sleep problems. In the next year, we will begin a new study to evaluate the impact of the WellSleep program. Feedback from participants and measurement of wellbeing will help refine the program which will eventually become a standard offering at Wellspring supporting people with cancer and their caregivers for years to come.