Sign Chi Do and Expressive Writing for Breast Cancer Survivors
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Introduction: Early recognition and aggressive therapies are known to raise survivorship rates among women with breast cancer. However, many survivors experience decreased quality of life (QOL) due to symptoms of fatigue and disturbed sleep that continue long after treatment. Exercise, meditation, and expressive writing (EW) have been effective in reducing fatigue among breast cancer patients. Sign Chi Do (SCD), a novel low-intensity exercise incorporates diaphragmatic breathing, meditation, gentle movement, has shown improved function, endurance, and physical activity among sedentary older adults. We hypothesize that SCD is enhanced by EW, and by specifically adapting two novel modalities, is more enjoyable, increases adherence to weekly practice, improves sleep, mood, and QOL, and reduces fatigue in breast cancer patients during treatment. Specific aims are: 1) In phase I, test the feasibility and acceptability of an adapted SCD/EW intervention on selected outcomes and anticipated burden of data collection among a group of breast cancer survivors who have completed treatment; 2) In phase II, with breast cancer patients in treatment, compare fatigue, sleep, mood, QOL, and PA outcomes between those in an adapted SCD/EW intervention with those receiving informational care. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the design of this two phase study.

Theoretical Framework: The perceived stress experienced by breast cancer patients during treatment creates an ongoing process of assessing perceived threat, feelings of helplessness, and hypervigilance. This leads to an increased risk of functional decline due to sleep disruption and subsequent fatigue. We propose that participating in SCD/EW promotes adaptation to stressors of breast cancer therapy by increasing physical activity via the gentle movements and improving mood via the meditative effect of SCD combined with EW, thereby decreasing sleep disruption and fatigue.

Methods: This study will use a 2-Phase, mixed methods approach to adapt the SCD intervention and combine it with an EW activity: 1) Use participant feedback to adapt the original SCD/EW intervention, to meet therapeutic limitations, time constraints and accessibility needs of breast cancer patients in treatment; and 2) Evaluate acceptability and feasibility of intervention and measurement procedures by breast cancer patients in treatment for future studies; and 3) Test effects of the SCD/EW intervention compared to informational care on outcomes in breast cancer patients receiving treatment.

Implications: A specifically-adapted SCD, with meditation enhanced by EW, may improve sleep, mood, and QOL; reduce fatigue, and be both feasible and acceptable to women breast cancer survivors. If effective, this SCD/EW intervention will impact the long term QOL of breast cancer patients in a variety of urban and rural settings. Findings will provide preliminary work on the intervention for a future NCI grant application.