

Breathlessness Management

Clare Horne

Lead Physiotherapist

Pilgrims Hospice



Defining Breathlessness

“Breathlessness is a perceived sensation.
The true nature of breathlessness is
appreciated by the person himself”

Webber and Pryor 1993

“Breathlessness is when the effort to
breathe is not satisfied by breathing”

Alexander Hough 1996

- “ Breathlessness is increasingly recognised as not simply a symptom of disordered breathing but also a complex interplay of physical, psychological emotional, and functional factors.”

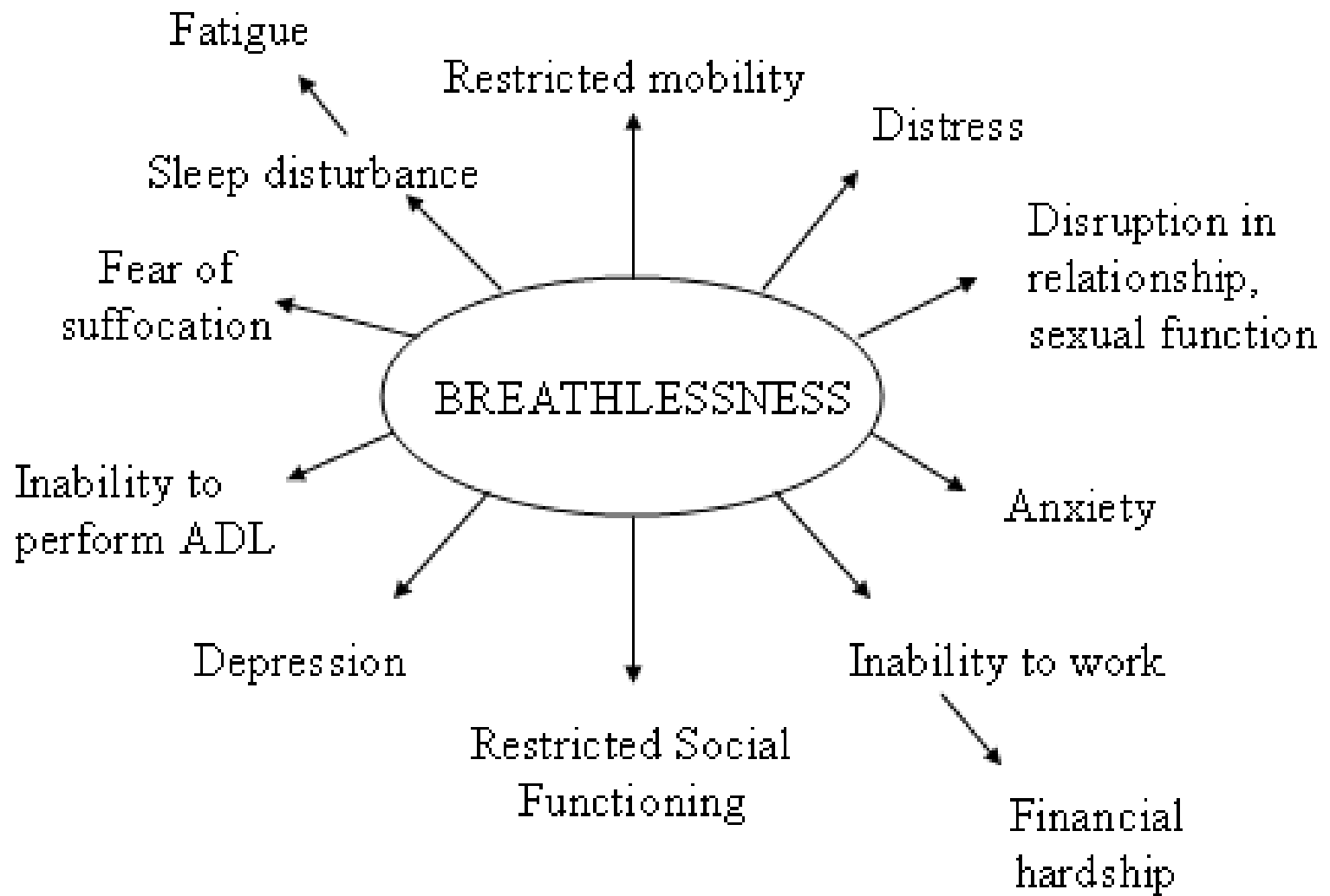
Corner. J. 1999

- “ Breathlessness is the most common and distressing symptom of both malignant and non malignant advanced cardio respiratory disease. Once treatments aimed at reversing the underlying disease become ineffectual, the symptom itself is very difficult to palliate and significantly reduces quality of life not only for the patient, but also for family members and other carers” Booth et al 2006

Lets try how it feels!

Patient quotes

- “... you want to take a deep breath but the body can't do it. It's like breathing through cotton wool..... It's so tiring”
- “... it's a terrible feeling of panic that you won't get another breath. I'm scared and frightened that I will suddenly stop breathing and die”
- “...I won't be ok... it's with me all the time and it never goes away”



The Classes

Three week, rolling programme:

Week one: Anatomy and Physiology

Week two: Anxiety Management

Week three: Pacing and Planning

Each week end with a different relaxation

Challenges

- Breathing....patient experiences shortness of breath
- Thinking....."I am going to stop breathing"
- Functioning....."I am going to avoid it"

Breathing control

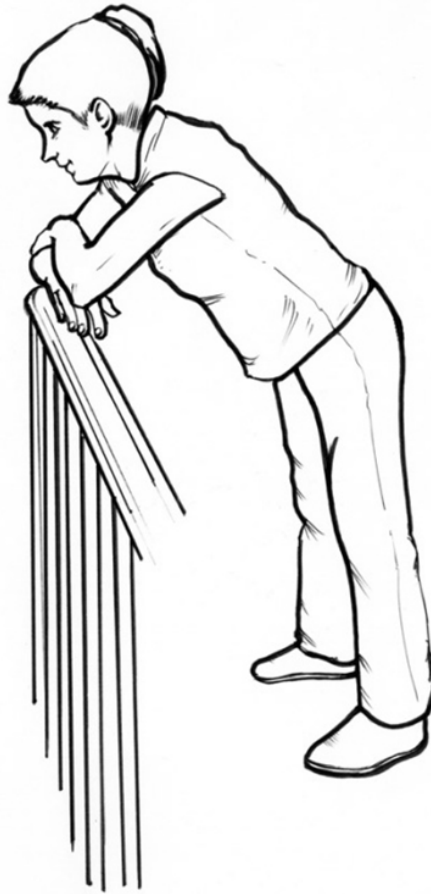
- Efficient breathing
- Takes practice to master
- Educate
- Position
- Relaxed shoulders and upper chest
- Abdominal movement
- Out breath longer than in breath
- Natural pause after out breath
- The breathing should remain “soft” and feel comfortable

BTS/ACPRC 2009, NICE Lung Cancer Guideline 2011

Positioning



Positioning



Recovery breathing

- If too breathless or anxious to manage breathing control:
 - 1. Forward lean position
 - 2. Fan
 - 3. Focus on longer out breaths

The Calm Hand

Walking aids



Walking aids



Walking aids



Relaxation... different techniques

- Talk to self in early stages of breathlessness
- Progressive muscular relaxation
- Personalised relaxation scripts (writing or audio)
- Relaxation CD
- Diary
- Guided visualisation / imagery

Relaxation



"If we have to do another one of those damn
Coca Cola commercials today, I'm gonna puke ..."

Potential barriers

- Fear that breathlessness/exercise is harmful
- Fear of breathlessness becoming uncontrolled
- Motivation and confidence (initial and long term)
- Repeated exacerbations
- Uncertainty about which exercise
- Weather...
 - logistics...
 - fatigue...
 - pain...
 - weakness...
 - fear of infection....

PATIENT QUOTES FOLLOWING PHYSIOTHERAPY

“I was frightened before I learnt what to do to help myself cope. I now know I can believe what you tell me”

“I feel I have been rescued. I can control my own body by relaxing my muscles and practicing my breathing exercises. It's like to blanket around me”

Practical tips

- Focus on the Breath out, the breath in will take care of itself
- We may not take away your breathlessness completely but we can help you to have a quicker recovery to reduce the impact of breathlessness
- Breathlessness in itself is not harmful and you will recover your breathing

Cont.

- Activity pacing involves, acceptance, behaviour modification and changing habits established over many years
- Involve the carers who are keen to help

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