Enhanced psychological care in cardiac rehabilitation services for patients with new-onset depression: the CADENCE feasibility study and pilot RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Rob Anderson contributes to the work of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Services and Delivery Research (HSDR) programme as an unpaid member of their funding advisory panel (a researcher-led funding stream). Rod S Taylor is the chairperson of the NIHR HSDR researcher-led panel, a member of the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Efficient Study Designs Board, the NIHR Priority Research Advisory Methodology Group, the HTA General Board, the HTA Themed Call, the Core Group of Methodological Experts for the NIHR Programme Grants for Applied Research programme and the HSDR Commissioning Board (commissioned and researcher led). Willem Kuyken receives royalties from the publication of Kuyken W, Padesky CA, Dudley R, Collaborative Case Conceptualization, New York, NY: Guildford Press; 2011, outside the submitted work.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.
Plain English summary

The CADENCE feasibility study and pilot RCT

Health Technology Assessment 2018; Vol. 22: No. 30
DOI: 10.3310/hta22300

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Plain English summary

After an acute heart problem, around 20% of people eligible for NHS cardiac rehabilitation have moderate or severe symptoms of depression. Although psychological health is part of cardiac rehabilitation, access to psychological care is patchy. Our aim was to develop and implement enhanced psychological care (EPC) to be delivered by nurses within cardiac rehabilitation teams. Nurses identified patients with depressive symptoms and offered them behavioural activation – an established treatment for depression that focuses on helping people with depression change the way they act. Nurses were also trained in how to monitor/manage the patient’s mental health-care needs.

First, we tested the practicality and acceptability of EPC from the patients’ and the nurses’ perspectives. After refinement, we then undertook a pilot study to further test EPC and to clarify uncertainties around the participant recruitment and retention needed to design a future randomised controlled trial (RCT) that would compare a group of people who receive EPC to a group who receive usual care. Preliminary testing of EPC (four teams, nine patients) found EPC to be acceptable, although nurses found it difficult to deliver within their existing workload. The intervention was refined to reduce workload, and then tested in a small pilot version of a potential RCT. Five teams were randomly allocated to deliver EPC and three teams to deliver usual care. Patients completed assessments at the beginning of the RCT and at 5 and 8 months after that. Measures assessed included mood, cardiac events, health-related quality of life and resource use. Twenty-nine patients participated in the trial (15 in the EPC arm and 14 in the usual-care arm).

Nurses and patients were also asked to take part in interviews.

Our pilot study showed that 93% of participants completed the 5-month follow-up assessment, but participant recruitment was challenging. At interview, patients and nurses acknowledged the importance of embedding psychological support within routine rehabilitation. However, significant organisational and workload constraints meant that EPC was not practical in routine care.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 12/189/06. The contractual start date was in April 2014. The draft report began editorial review in October 2016 and was accepted for publication in September 2017. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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