Cancer distress reduction with a couple-based skills training: a randomized controlled trial.

There are few interventions for couples facing cancer. This study aims to investigate the utility of providing dyadic skills to these couples. Woman recently diagnosed with breast or gynecological cancer and their partners were randomly assigned to either a couple-skills intervention (Side by Side) or to cancer education (Couples Control Program). Assessments with self-report and behavioral observation of both partners were conducted four times over 16 months. Multilevel analyses of data from 72 participating couples suggest that females receiving Side by Side showed larger reductions in fear of progression, and couples reported less avoidance in dealing with the cancer, more posttraumatic growth, and better relationship skills relative to the Couples Control Program. All differences favoring Side by Side disappeared by 16 months after the diagnosis. Short-term changes in functioning may be improved by enhancing couples' dyadic skills during acute medical treatment of the disease.