

## **Lithuanian Project "Together against cancer - not just to undergo, but to live"**

The project with the funding from the Lithuanian Public Health Foundation (70 thousand Euro) was implemented by the Lithuanian Society of Prostate Cancer Patients, and Lithuanian Cancer Patient Coalition (POLA) in 2020, the main activities of the project continue to this day.

The main purpose of the project – to provide psychological counselling services to men who have experienced an emotional crisis due to the diagnosis of prostate cancer or another oncological disease, as well as their carers. For 12 months, a total of 909 participants (oncology patients and their relatives) took part in the project activities.

Results achieved during the project funding period (12 months):

1. 19 interactive meetings were organized in 15 Lithuanian cities, aimed at helping men diagnosed with prostate cancer or other oncological diseases and their relatives to better deal with anxiety, factors complicating the physiological and emotional state, and the difficulties experienced. The number of participants was 418, the number healthcare professionals was 3: doctor, nurse, and psychotherapist.
2. 242 individual psychological consultations with an average duration of 50 minutes were provided by telephone to oncology patients and/or their relatives, 5 psychologists were involved.
3. A community for prostate cancer patients and their relatives operating on the principles of a self-support group was established in the social network Facebook: "Life after prostate cancer": <https://www.facebook.com/groups/562230514572947/>, 199 people joined it during the project implementation period, 305 posts were published.
4. The pilot model of the prostate cancer manager for newly diagnosed persons was implemented: 324 persons who applied for social assistance were issued a project partner's POLA card, at least 50 persons were provided with case manager consultations.
5. A report on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the project's activities was carried out - the study "Common anxiety and emotional stressors, difficulties and effective countermeasures for oncology patients and their relatives " could be found at [https://pola.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tyrimas\\_Nerim-keliantys-ir-emocin-b-kl-apsunkinantys-veiksniai.pdf](https://pola.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tyrimas_Nerim-keliantys-ir-emocin-b-kl-apsunkinantys-veiksniai.pdf)

During the implementation of project, people participating in interactive meetings and individual consultations were interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the meeting, asking them to evaluate and compare their well-being, attitude, and mood. Additional questions were also asked about the most common anxiety and emotional crisis factors for men with prostate cancer and their relatives and the most effective countermeasures. These questions were also analyzed during semi-structured interviews, in which lecturers who conducted interactive meetings, psychologists of individual consultations, FB community moderators and case managers were invited to provide their insights.

The analysis revealed that the project was successful because the patients and their relatives who participated in the interactive meetings indicated that thanks to the sessions, they gained competences to deal with emotional and physical difficulties, and after the seminars, their physical and emotional well-being improved statistically significantly. The usefulness of the project's activities and the need for continuity were also identified by the persons who coordinated the implementation of all other activities, with whom in-depth interviews were conducted.

The data analysis showed that both patients and their relatives experience the most anxiety not about themselves but about their family members. That is why aiming to improve the patient's well-being supporting the patient's family members can be even more important and useful. Patients' carers were also more concerned about patients' well-being than patients themselves, so educating relatives about how to properly support the patient can have a more significant impact on the patient's well-being, as well as empowering them how properly support them.

One of the insights of the analysis was, that the global Covid19 pandemic, which had started during the implementation of the project, stipulated need to find alternative ways to ensure the education of patients and their relatives, other than face to face seminars. Providing psychological consultations by phone made it possible to reach a part of the target group that could have not taken advantage of this possibility due to their geographical location or other socioeconomic characteristics. The introduction of remote methods such as on-line webinars proved to be useful and welcomed by cancer patients society.

*Since 2020, till now, Paulius Rakstys represents and manages this project in his country. For three years he was President of POLA, now he is a POLA board member.*