

# JOINT LCA-BRC RESEARCH TRAINING FELLOWSHIP

**Development of a Psycho-educational / Psychosexual  
Training Programme for Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs)  
Working with Women Experiencing Treatment-induced  
Sexual Difficulties after Breast Cancer**

**RM Partners**

Accountable Cancer Network

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# Research Team

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# Background to Study

- **Women treated for breast cancer typically experience disruption** to one or more domains of the female sexual response through changes to sexual identity, sexual function and sexual relationship dynamic (Cavalhero et al., 2012).
- **The prevalence of sexual difficulties in this group of women** varies significantly, ranging from desire disorder 23–64%, altered arousal or vaginal lubrication concerns 20–48%, orgasmic concerns 16–36% to dyspareunia 35–38% (Sadovsky *et al.* 2010)
- **Identified risk factors** include; younger age, unpartnered or relationship dissatisfaction, poorer psychological health, pre-existing sexual difficulties, treatment-associated fertility concerns and body image disturbance (Boquiren *et al.* 2016).

# Breast Cancer Treatment-induced Sexual Difficulties

- **Impacts from Local Therapies:** effects of breast surgery, reconstructive procedures or breast radiotherapy -altered breast appearance and sensation.
- **Impact from Systemic Therapies :** chemotherapy induced ovarian failure resulting in abrupt premature menopause  
+/- endocrine therapy treatment-induced menopausal symptoms.
- Symptoms may be worsened by new practice of extending and escalating endocrine therapy from the ATLAS, SOFT and TEXT studies

# Study Rationale

- **Brief, targeted sexual health training** for oncology professionals focused on improving knowledge and specialist communication skills correlates with improved confidence and frequency of addressing female cancer –related sexual concerns (Wang *et al.* 2015).
- **Nurses are well placed to assess patient’s sexual concerns** as they interact with patients throughout the treatment pathway.
- **Development of the nurse specialist role** to include psycho-education and brief counselling related to women’s sexual well-being should therefore be explored

# Study Aim

To identify the research and practice evidence base to develop a clinical nurse specialist training programme to improve management of breast cancer treatment-associated sexual difficulties.

# Study Methods

The research and practice evidence base was undertaken using the **MRC framework for Complex Interventions (2008)**

- **Two systematic literature reviews** were conducted to identify effective interventions for the amelioration of sexual difficulties in breast cancer survivors and to identify sexual health training programmes in oncology.
- **Structured focus group interviews** (n=5) with breast clinical nurse specialists (n=3) and other breast oncology health care professionals (n=2) were undertaken to explore current practice and breast specialist nurses training and development needs

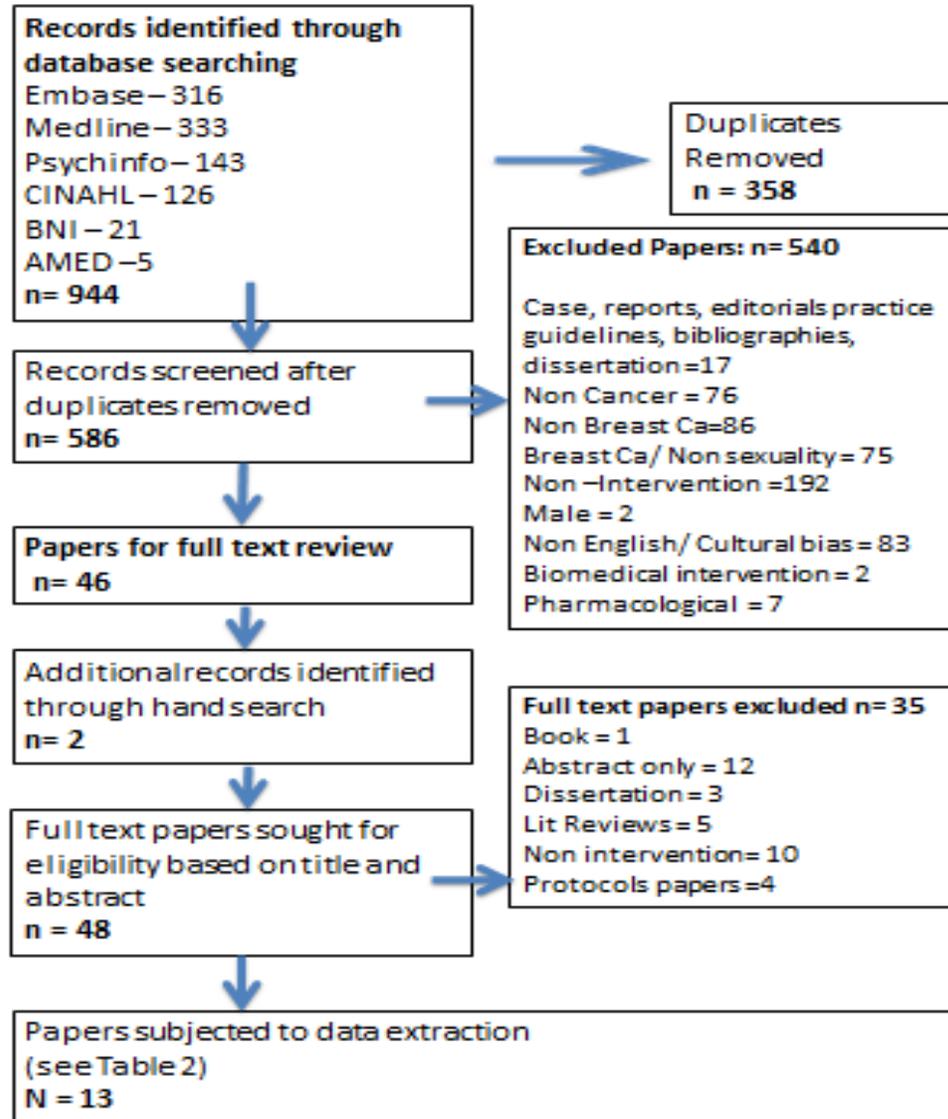
# Literature Review

**The first literature search** aimed to identify, psycho-educational, psychological or psychosexual interventions that have been developed and tested for the management of sexual difficulties in breast cancer survivors.

**The second literature search** evaluated studies regarding training and education of nurses in the management of treatment associated sexual difficulties in patients as a consequence of cancer treatment.

# Systematic Literature Review 1

Figure 1: Flow chart for Intervention Studies Review Search Strategy

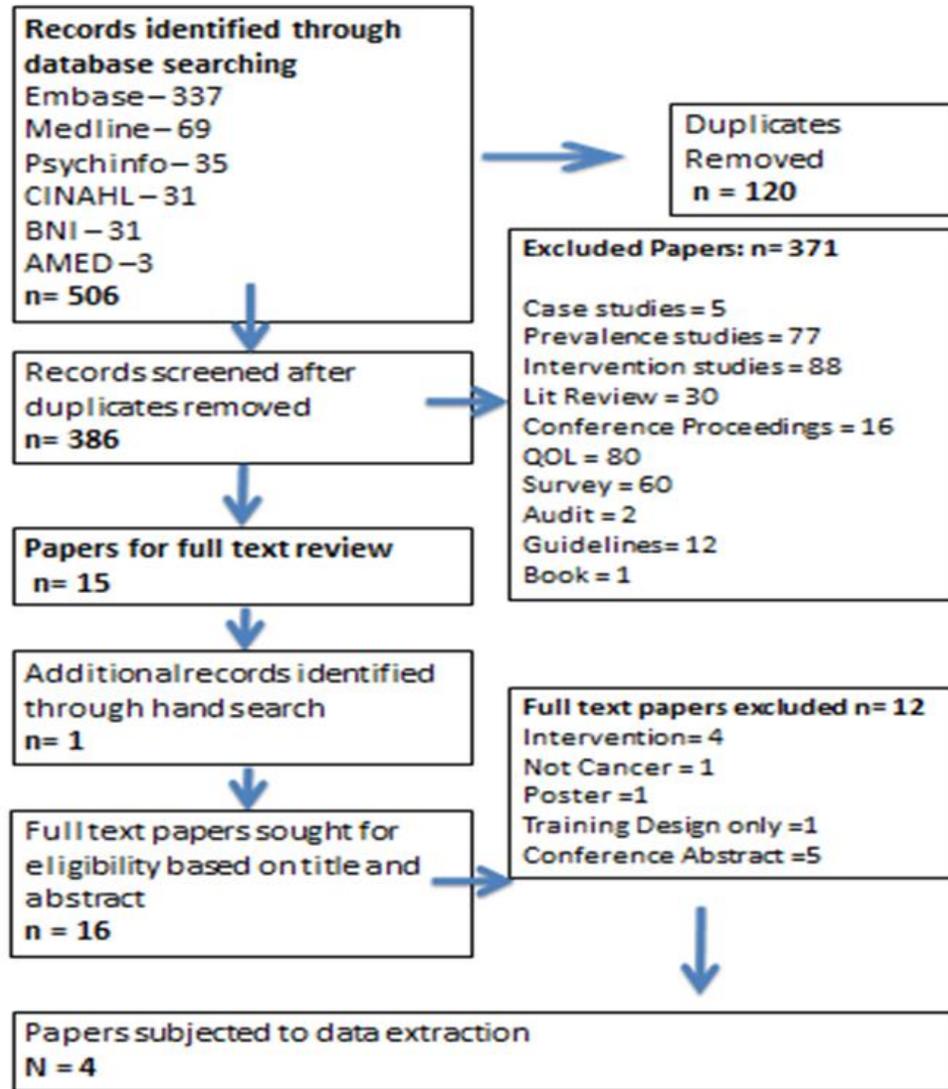


## Findings: Features for Intervention efficacy

- **Brief and integrated** into the treatment pathway.
- **Multi-modality content to include:** psycho-educational, practical strategies, communication skills, elements involving couples directly or indirectly. Psychosexual principles (sensitive/ focus), CBT.
- **Delivery** - remote methods e.g. telephone, online delivery suggested.
- Inclusion of **training** for health care professionals to deliver a brief targeted intervention.

# Systematic Literature Review 2

Figure 2: Flow chart for Training Programme Review Search Strategy



## Findings: Effective training elements

- **Brief**
- **Targeted** to improve subject comfort levels, include knowledge and communication skills development.
- **Content** to include: cancer –related sexual issues, national and local sexual health resources/referrals/guidelines, sexual health assessment models, relational impacts education.
- **Mixed methods training** : didactic, scenario/ experiential, problem based learning
- **Multi-modality delivery:** face-to-face, online, videos, e-bulletins

# Qualitative Data Analysis

- **To explore current practice** and breast specialist nurses training and development needs
- **Structured Focus Group Interviews** with clinical nurse specialists (n=3) and other breast oncology health care professionals (n=2) were undertaken.
- Transcripts were subjected to **thematic framework analysis**.

# Core Focus Group Themes for Breast CNS training programme

- **Knowledge content** : physical and non-physical impacts of treatment, ethnic/ cultural/ sexual minorities/ social status influences on sexuality, barriers to the management of sexual difficulty in practice , couple/relationship difficulties, reproductive health issues in breast cancer
- **Communication skills development**: developing the language of talking about sex, modes of communicating , professional scope, standardisation, touchpoints for conversation, opening conversations, setting expectations, normalising, communicating with partners

# Core Focus Group Themes for Breast CNS training programme

- **Management of sexual concerns:** patient-centred, guidelines, education, multi-modality treatments/interventions, partners inclusion, psychological tools
- **Training:** incorporate enhanced knowledge training to advanced skills development; communication skills, psychological skills training, psychosexual content, flexible mixed methods delivery (face-to face, workbook, case studies, experts, digital).

# Study Findings Summary

## Findings from the published studies suggest:

- A combination of psycho-educational, psychosexual and practical strategies, communication skills development and inclusion of couple strategies were most effective in improving sexual well-being in women affected by breast cancer
- Sexual health training programmes in oncology should incorporate a mixed methods training delivery aimed to improve both knowledge and communication skills.

# Study Findings Summary

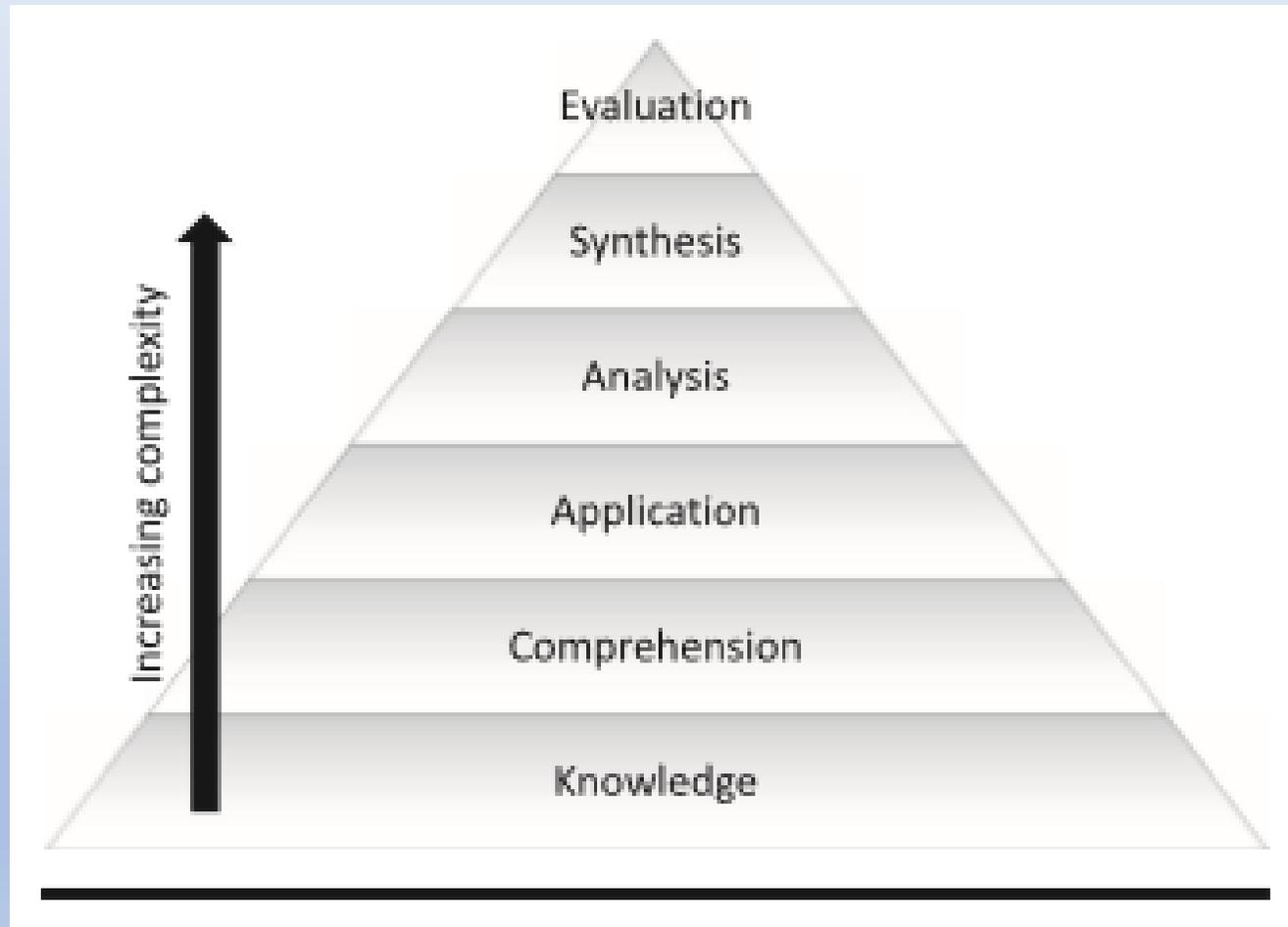
## **Interview analysis yielded the following overarching themes:**

- Communication and brief counselling skills development training was considered important.
- A 2-tier programme structure was favoured, with knowledge foundation levels progressing to skills development and practice application.

This data has informed the development of an eight module training programme for Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists to address the sexual concerns of women treated for Breast Cancer



# Theoretical Model - Bloom's Taxonomy



# 2- Tiered Training Programme Designed

Four Foundation Level ( Knowledge Development) Modules:

1. **Normal Female Sexual Response**
2. **Impact of Breast Cancer and Breast Cancer Treatment on Female Sexual Functioning**
3. **Menopause**
4. **Vaginal Health**

Four Intermediate Level ( Skills Development)Modules:

5. **Communicating about Sex and Sexual Difficulties**
6. **Assessment of Sexual Difficulties**
7. **Working with Couples**
8. **Psycho-educational, Psychological and Psychosexual Support Strategies**



# Training Programme Designed for Flexible Delivery

## Training Methods options

- Didactic traditional face-to face instructional training.
- Online Remote instructor led training.
- Online self-directed learning.
- The utilisation of scenario based training- case studies.

## Training Delivery

- Face-to- face
- Narrated PowerPoint (online)
- Video- case studies
- Web links
- Recommended Readings

The eight module training programme for Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists to address the sexual concerns of women treated for Breast Cancer is now ready for piloting.



# References

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# Thank You

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- **Breast Cancer Care UK**

