

Brooke Russell



Biography

Brooke is an MSc student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Calgary under the joint supervision of Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen and Dr. Fiona Schulte. She obtained her BA (hons) in Psychology from the University of Calgary in 2015. Brooke has had a longstanding interest in psychosocial oncology, and her undergraduate thesis work examined the follow-up care practices of primary-care providers for adult survivors of childhood cancer in Alberta.

After completing her undergraduate degree she worked as a research coordinator in the Hematology, Oncology, and Transplant program at the Alberta Children's Hospital for two years before beginning her graduate work. This position allowed her the opportunity to work within a fully-integrated multidisciplinary team of oncologists, psychologists, neuropsychologists, nurses, child-life specialists, and clinical researchers, alongside patients and families receiving care on the unit. This experience elucidated the unparalleled value of working with professionals from across disciplines, and collaborating with patients and families on research endeavors.

Brooke is passionate about patient-oriented research, and is currently focused on investigating the survivorship experience of pediatric cancer survivors. She is eager to begin work on her project, which will examine the relationship between psychological symptom burden (disrupted sleep, fatigue, trauma symptoms, and pain) and the health-related quality of life of childhood cancer survivors. Ultimately, she hopes her work can help to improve long-term psychological outcomes for pediatric cancer survivors.

Project Summary

Survivors of Childhood Cancer: Isolating Modifiable Targets to Improve Health-Related Quality of Life

Approximately 1,270 Canadian children are diagnosed with cancer each year; fortunately, over 82% will survive. Although the survival statistics are encouraging, three in four survivors will develop a mental or physical illness resulting from the treatment they received, significantly reducing their quality of life. For some survivors, quality of life can become exceptionally poor. Thus, it is exceedingly important that potential solutions to these problems be developed, so that survivors can live healthy and productive lives.

Research suggests that some survivors experience persistent pain, difficulty sleeping, and traumatic memories of their cancer experience. These symptoms are often related to one another and frequently occur together. Moreover, pain, difficulty sleeping, and trauma have been shown to persist for years after treatment has ended and can be extremely distressing. Ultimately, each of these symptoms can significantly reduce the quality of life of long-term survivors of childhood cancer.

Brooke's research will identify which elevated psychological symptoms (pain symptoms; fatigue symptoms; trauma symptoms; sleep disturbances) are most strongly associated with a reduction in quality of life. By doing so, her research has the ability to identify targets for early interventions aimed at reducing the burden of cancer survivorship and improving quality of life for survivors. This work is embedded within a larger program of research that is focused on the long-term psychological well-being of survivors of pediatric cancer.