Getting on Track – a virtual walking challenge for people affected by Neuroendocrine Tumours (NETs) in South Australia

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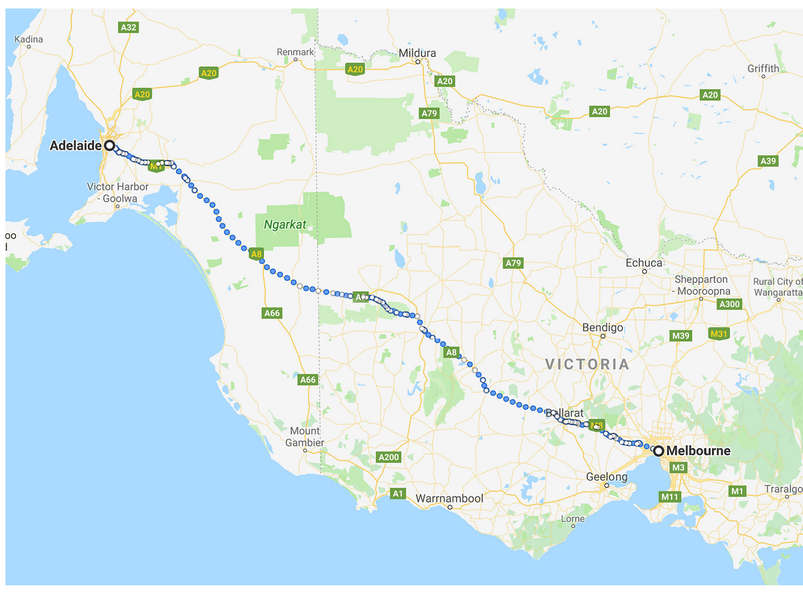

Background

Neuroendocrine Tumours (NETs) are a complex group of tumours that arise from the Neuroendocrine cells of the body. They can be found in almost any organ of the body and can range from indolent to very aggressive. People with NETs can live with a tumour for many years - sometimes even decades and will likely undergo a variety of treatments throughout the course of their disease, including but not limited to: Surgery, Somatostatin Analogues, Chemotherapy, Biological Therapies, Radiotherapy, Peptide Receptor Radionuclide Therapy (PRRT) or Liver directed therapies.

Physical exercise and healthy eating is known to have many positive effects on the physical and psychological well-being of people living with cancer. Access to affordable exercise and wellness programs are limited for people diagnosed with NETs and there are currently no programs aimed specifically at people with NETs in Australia.

Objectives

- To increase the number of participants meeting the Australian physical activity and sedentary guidelines during the program.
- To improve daily fruit and vegetable intake of people affected by NETs by participating in a virtual challenge.

Methods

A free, four week program was piloted to the South Australian Unicorn Foundation NET Support group and their families/friends, using the 'Get on track©' website (http://getontrackchallenge.com.au) (WA department of Health). 13 people registered for the SA NET challenge, forming 3 teams. Teams progressed along the virtual track from Adelaide to Melbourne by uploading their daily step count, intensity of physical activity, minutes exercised and fruit and vegetable intake. An initial information session was held during a SA NET support group meeting to outline the 'Get on track©' program and the current Australian physical activity and sedentary guidelines. Teams were encouraged to build on their current daily activity level, with the eventual aim of reaching 10,000 steps or 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity each day. However, emphasis was placed on improving their current level of fitness gradually; as meeting the current standards may be problematic for the NET population due to symptoms of fatigue, pain, diarrhoea and other disease related side effects.

Results/Outcomes

Data was collected by the 'Get on track©' website via cross-sectional baseline and follow-up surveys. Anonymous data was provided at the completion of the program for analysis. A further follow up survey was emailed to participants for evaluation of the program itself.

Overall, the results were positive. There was a 14.6% increase in the number of physical activity minutes challengers were achieving throughout the challenge. This occurred over an average of 4.1 days per week, down from 5.1 at the beginning of the challenge. There was also a 14.9% reduction in the average BMI of participants during the challenge.

The nutritional data was also encouraging. There was 150% increase in participant's daily vegetable intake. On average, participants were consuming 3.9 servings of vegetables at the commencement of the challenge, increasing to 4.3 servings on completion. Participant's fruit intake remained unchanged over the course of the challenge (an average of 2.6 servings per day). However, this is already greater than Australian dietary guidelines' recommended 2 servings per day.

Participants rated the program highly - 92% stating they would participate in virtual exercise program again. 77% of participants also felt they could maintain changes in physical activity made during the program into the future. Limitations of the program include the small sample size with self-reported outcomes and long term changes not measured.

" the element of friendly competition gave me the motivation to walk everyday "

– Challenge participant

Conclusions

Participants in the 'SA NET' virtual walking challenge made positive improvements to their daily physical activity and vegetable intake, with likely follow on beneficial effects on general well-being.

The free web-based platform made it easily accessible for participants; with the potential to engage rural and remote patients in the future.

References

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