

FEAR OF CANCER RECURRENCE Fact Sheet

WHAT IS FEAR OF CANCER RECURRENCE?

Fear of cancer recurrence (FCR) is defined as *fear, worry or concern relating to the possibility that cancer will come back or progress.*ⁱ

Created in 2015 by a group of expert researchers, policy-makers and patient advocates from around the world, this definition suggests FCR can affect both patients with a curable disease who fear the cancer coming back, as well as patients with advanced disease who fear progression. This definition is widely recognised and is accepted for use in current research studies.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FCR?

Fear of cancer recurrence is a unique and significant mental health issue. It can impact an individual's quality of life and is associated with anxiety, depression and isolation. FCR can also hinder the ability to plan for the future.

FCR can present itself in varying levels of severityⁱⁱ:

- Mild FCR – Occasional thoughts about cancer with peaks of anxiety that are resolved after a few days. These occasions are triggered by external factors like follow-up medical appointments.
- Moderate to severe FCR – More frequent thoughts about cancer without external triggers (one or more time per week), a perceived inability to control these thoughts, and a strong feeling of related distress.

Severe FCR is considered clinically significant and is unlikely to resolve itself without clinical intervention. Clinically significant or severe FCR is associated with the followingⁱⁱⁱ:

1. Death-related thoughts
2. Feeling alone
3. Believing that cancer will return
4. Experiencing uncertainty
5. Having cancer-related thoughts and imagery that are difficult to control
6. Daily and recurrent thoughts
7. Thoughts that last 30 minutes or longer
8. Experiencing distress
9. Experience of increased distress over time
10. Impact on individual's daily life

