



Sexual Health and Cancer

COURSE SYLLABUS

2026

Course Facilitator: Lisa Roelfsema, Bibiana Kemerer

Course Offering: de Souza Institute in collaboration with the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology

Course Format: Real-time online seminar & eLearning

Contact Information: support@desouzainstitute.com

Registration: Required

A. INTRODUCTION

Cancer causes wide-ranging impacts on sexual health and wellbeing and numerous studies have identified that people affected by cancer want support, education, and counselling in this area. While health professionals consistently acknowledge that sexuality is within their scope of practice, few health professionals consistently assess or intervene in sexual health problems in cancer settings. The “**Sexual Health and Cancer**” course is designed to provide health professionals with the knowledge and skills to intervene with the sexual problems that arise in cancer. This course is 7 weeks in length. The emphasis in “Sexual Health and Cancer” is on understanding the issues and developing skills in assessment and psycho-education. It is designed for all health professionals who work with people affected by cancer.

B. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this 7-week course is to assist health professionals in cancer care to integrate human sexuality in their thinking and practice. Sexual concerns are one of the most common problems encountered in cancer care settings; yet they are the least likely to be discussed unless asked. The framework of this course encourages course participants to: 1) address their own, and society’s, attitudes and biases towards sexuality and sexual health; 2) increase knowledge regarding functional and dysfunctional aspects of human sexuality; and 3) develop knowledge and skill with regard to assessment and educational interventions for common sexual health issues in cancer care. Attention to issues of diversity will be integrated throughout.

Pre-requisite: While the course “Interprofessional Psychosocial Oncology: Introduction to Theory and Practice” is not a required pre-requisite it is recommended, particularly for students who have limited background in cancer care.

C. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Learning Objectives

- Explore personal beliefs, attitudes and biases that facilitate, or create barriers to, sexual health care in cancer.
- Understand normal sexual function across the lifespan, including anatomy, physiology,

psychology and social/relational aspects of sexuality.

- Discuss the impact of cancer and treatment on sexuality and sexual function.
- Describe an integrated model of sexual health care and possibilities for integrating the model in clinical cancer settings.
- Discuss the role of your own discipline, as well as the role of the interprofessional team in addressing sexual health problems.
- Develop skill in using the first 2 levels of the PLISSIT Model
- Demonstrate understanding of the 3-4 levels of the PLISSIT Model
- Develop comfort in discussing sexual concerns with people from a variety of backgrounds.

D. MODE OF LEARNING

- The course design is web-based. Students register for a particular seminar time/interprofessional group. These groups will meet for 60 minutes with a faculty facilitator once each week using online voice technology ("Live Classroom"). Using guided activities and exercises, the small groups will have opportunities to develop and practice interprofessional collaboration skills as well as opportunities to learn from, with and about each other.
- A range of innovative learning resources have been developed specifically for this course, including case study narratives, video-taped interviews, and dramatizations of individual, family and interprofessional situations. Cases will provide opportunities for students to learn about diverse and marginalized communities. Online discussion boards will be maintained to explore course topics.
- Students are expected to use the online resources to do independent work for the unit. On line resources include content modules, case studies, interviews, narratives, plays, and other dramatic productions.
- Students are expected to take responsibility for ensuring that their computer system is configured for the course site. Computers used at your agency will need to be configured by your own IT department due to firewalls and other barriers such as administrator rights. Simple directions are provided in the course landing page, under "Virtual Classrooms (BigBlueButton - for students)". **Please** ensure that you look after this **before** the course begins. Failure to do so will result in frustration and inconvenience not only for you but also for your group.

E. MODES OF EVALUATION

There is no grade given for this course. However, to receive a certificate of completion, course participants are expected to complete the following:

1. **Reflective Journals**

Throughout the course we ask that you keep an ongoing Reflective Journal of your learning moments in relation to the course content. The journals will be handed in to the course instructors twice during the course (on either week 2 or 3 or either week 6 or 7). A pass/fail mark is assigned to the Reflection Journal as a whole.

2. **Participation**

Students are expected to contribute regularly and meaningfully to online discussions, posted reflection questions and in the online seminar discussions. Students are also expected to contribute to creating a safe learning environment for themselves and their colleagues.

F. FACILITATOR AVAILABILITY

Facilitator for this course will be responsible to guide the eLearning component including online discussion, to lead online conference session, to be available to you for questions throughout the course and to provide final grade. The response time from a participant enquiry to a facilitator response ranges from 24 hour to 48 hours. Technical support is available by contacting support@desouzainstitute.com

COURSE TIMELINE

Week 1	• Orientation to the Course • Creating an interprofessional community of learning in cyberspace
Sexual Health Care in Cancer: Rationale and Barriers	
Week 2	• Why address sexual health in cancer care? • Enhancing skills, knowledge, and comfort. • Exploring sexual health myths, and stereotypes.
An Integrated Model of Sexual Health Care	
Week 3	• Introduction to an integrated model of sexual health care. • Comfort in assessment and education skills across difference.
Introduction to Sexual Health Assessment	
Week 4	• Sexual health assessment. • Introduction to the PLISSIT model.
Cancer, Sexuality and Males	
Week 5	• Specific issues related to male's sexual health. • Assessment and intervention skills.
Cancer, Sexuality and Females	
Week 6	• Specific issues related to female's sexual health. • Assessment and intervention skills.
Self-Care and Professional Ethics	
Week 7	• Self-care and ethics in the context of providing sexual health care. • Course review and invitation to next section, Sex Counselling in Cancer.

Statutory Holidays

When your scheduled seminar falls on a statutory holiday, groups will need to negotiate with their group facilitator about how to make up the seminar time in order that all the topics are covered, i.e., to have a longer seminar the week following or preceding the holiday.

G. FACILITATOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Roelfsema is a clinical social worker with over 16 years' experience at Trillium Health Partners, the last 10 specializing in working with patients and families affected by Cancer. Part of her role at the Mississauga Halton/Central West Regional Cancer Centre, involves facilitating the Women's Sexual Health Group Program for women who have had any type of cancer. Lisa is also a facilitator of the on-line Gynegals group for women with gynecological cancer experiencing sexual side effects. Lisa also has a long standing interest and additional training in the area of the impact of illness on sexuality and sexual function. Lisa has a private practice in Streetsville for individuals, couples and families struggling with medical illness and related spirituality, sexuality, relationship issues, grief and loss concerns.

Bibiana Kemerer is a MSc graduate from the University of British Columbia examining psychological interventions for couples after prostate cancer. She now works as a researcher studying PTSD therapies for Canadian veterans and also works as a sexual health coach for patients at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

H. GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION

Discussion related to course content will take place in the collaboration discussion forums. The collaboration discussion forums provide you with the opportunity to share ideas and clarify your understanding of course content and readings.

K. SOCIAL FORUM

The social forum is provided for you, the participants, to post news, items of general interest, share information about yourselves and to raise topics of interest beyond the specific questions being discussed in the module-specific forums. All messages of a social nature can be posted in the social forum. This forum is open to all participants, including the facilitator.

L. VIRTUAL LIBRARY

The de Souza Institute has a virtual library <http://library.desouzainstitute.com/login> that can be accessed to those registered in this course or any other de Souza Institute continuing education program. This invaluable resource enables you to access over 1500 e-Journals, 200 e-books and 8 on-line databases such as CINHALL or Ovid-Medline. You can use the virtual library to access the required reading materials for your course. The virtual library can be accessed 24 hours a day using your de Souza Institute login and password.

M. TECHNICAL SUPPORT

eLearning Centre Orientation

If this is the first time you are taking a course offered by the de Souza Institute, please complete the eLearning Centre Orientation, located on your eLearning Centre landing page. This is designed to introduce you to online learning and help you understand how to navigate through the de Souza Institute eLearning center and courses. The goal of eLearning orientation is to answer all of your questions in order to facilitate a dynamic and meaningful learning experience.

de Souza Support

If you have questions about the content of the course, please email your course facilitator. If you need assistance accessing or navigating the eLearning Center, please refer to the eLearning Orientation course. If you have questions or have any general technical difficulties please contact support@desouzainstitute.com

N. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

[Academic Honesty and Copyright Policy](#)

[Cancellations, Incomplete and No Show Policy](#)

[Request for accommodation Policy](#)

Course content and resources provided in this course are based on best practice guidelines from provincial and national bodies. Please consult your educator if you have specific questions related to local protocols and policies as they vary among healthcare organizations.