

Tulane study finds neurotic or introverted men more likely to be distressed after cancer diagnosis

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A new study by Tulane University researchers finds a potential role for personality psychology in cancer care. (Photo from Thinkstock)

Men who are neurotic or introverted are more likely to be distressed after their prostate cancer diagnosis, according to a new study by researchers at Tulane University.

The findings suggest those personality traits are important factors in how men responded to the bad health news. The results of the study lead by Laura Perry, a Tulane doctoral student in health psychology, are published in the journal [*Psycho-Oncology*](#).

The researchers surveyed 212 men with prostate cancer about their tendencies on five well-established personality traits. These men also reported on their degree of emotional distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Findings showed that emotional distress was more common among participants with certain personality tendencies—neuroticism, defined as a tendency to be emotionally unstable and experience negative emotions; or introversion, a tendency to be withdrawn, reserved, and inhibited.

The study found that 37 percent of participants had at least one form of emotional distress (anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts). Those who were neurotic or introverted were more than twice as likely to experience emotional distress compared to the rest of the sample. These effects of personality could not be explained by other factors, such as participants' age, education level, or health characteristics.

“Someone who is neurotic may tend to interpret an event, such as a prostate cancer diagnosis, as a more significant threat to their wellbeing,” Perry says. “Someone who is introverted may be less likely to seek support from friends and family during their illness. In either scenario, these individuals may be less equipped to cope with the emotional burden of cancer.”

The study suggests a potential role for personality psychology in cancer care. Perry says future studies are needed to investigate whether assessing personality tendencies during routine appointments could strengthen patient care.