

Development of a Patient-Centered Leaflet on Abdominal Wall Hernia (AWH) and Mental Health

Asim ABBAS, Charlotte BENTHAM, Veronica OLIVIA-JENKINS, Srinivas CHINTAPATLA

York Abdominal Wall Unit, York Hospital, UK

Aim

Patients with abdominal wall hernia (AWH) face physical, psychological, and emotional challenges, including changes to body image, self-esteem, and relationships. However, patient-focused resources addressing these issues are limited. This project aimed to develop a plain English leaflet to support individuals with AWH, improve understanding of its psychosocial impact, and offer practical coping strategies.

Methods

- **Identifying Key Themes** – A qualitative study conducted by the York Abdominal Wall Unit used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of patients with AWH.
- **Themes** included body image, mental health, relationships, and coping strategies.
- **Multidisciplinary Collaboration** – The leaflet was co-developed by surgeons and the hospital's Head of Psychological Medicine, integrating psychological insights with surgical expertise.
- **Patient Engagement** – Representatives from national hernia support groups reviewed and provided feedback, highlighting the need for sections on guilt, self-blame, and coping strategies.
- **Readability Enhancement** – The leaflet was revised to align with plain English guidelines, achieving a Flesch Reading Ease Score of 60–70 for accessibility.

Results

The final leaflet includes:

1. **Body Image and Self-Esteem** – Impact on self-perception and concerns about how others view them.
2. **Interpersonal Relationships** – Social withdrawal, intimacy concerns, and relationship changes.
3. **Emotional Responses** – Anxiety, depression, frustration, and fear of judgment.
4. **Guilt and Self-Blame** – Feelings of responsibility, sadness, and frustration.
5. **Coping Strategies** – Practical advice including reframing thoughts, mindfulness, goal setting, and social support.

The final version was well-received by patient representatives, who found it clear, relatable, and supportive.

Conclusion

This project demonstrates the importance of multidisciplinary, patient-centered education in surgical care. By combining qualitative research, psychological expertise, and patient feedback, we developed a plain English leaflet that validates patient experiences and offers actionable coping strategies. Future work will evaluate its impact on patient understanding, emotional well-being, and coping mechanisms.

