

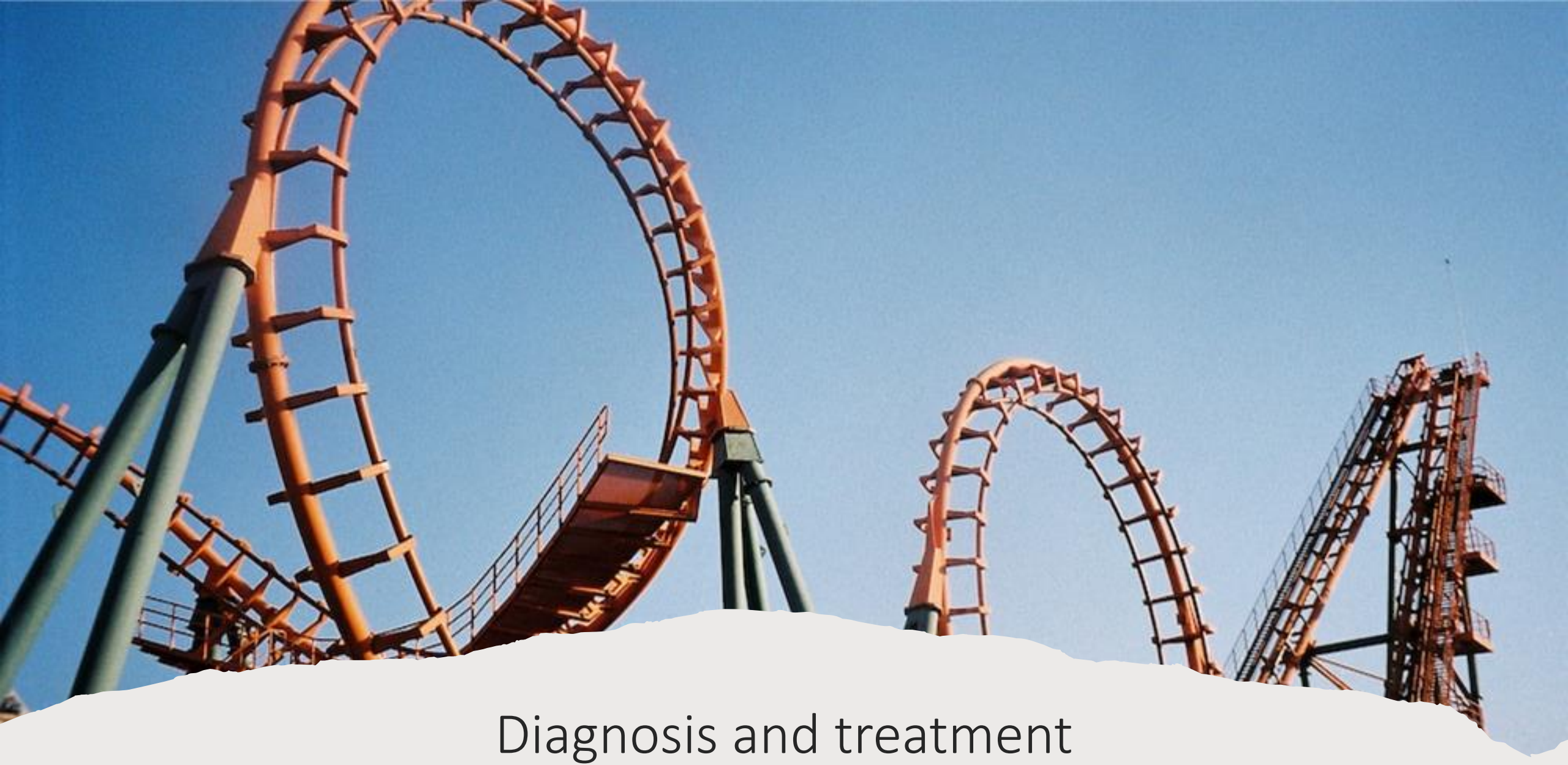
# Psychological Impact of Cancer

Dr Alison Farmer

Psycho-oncology CNS

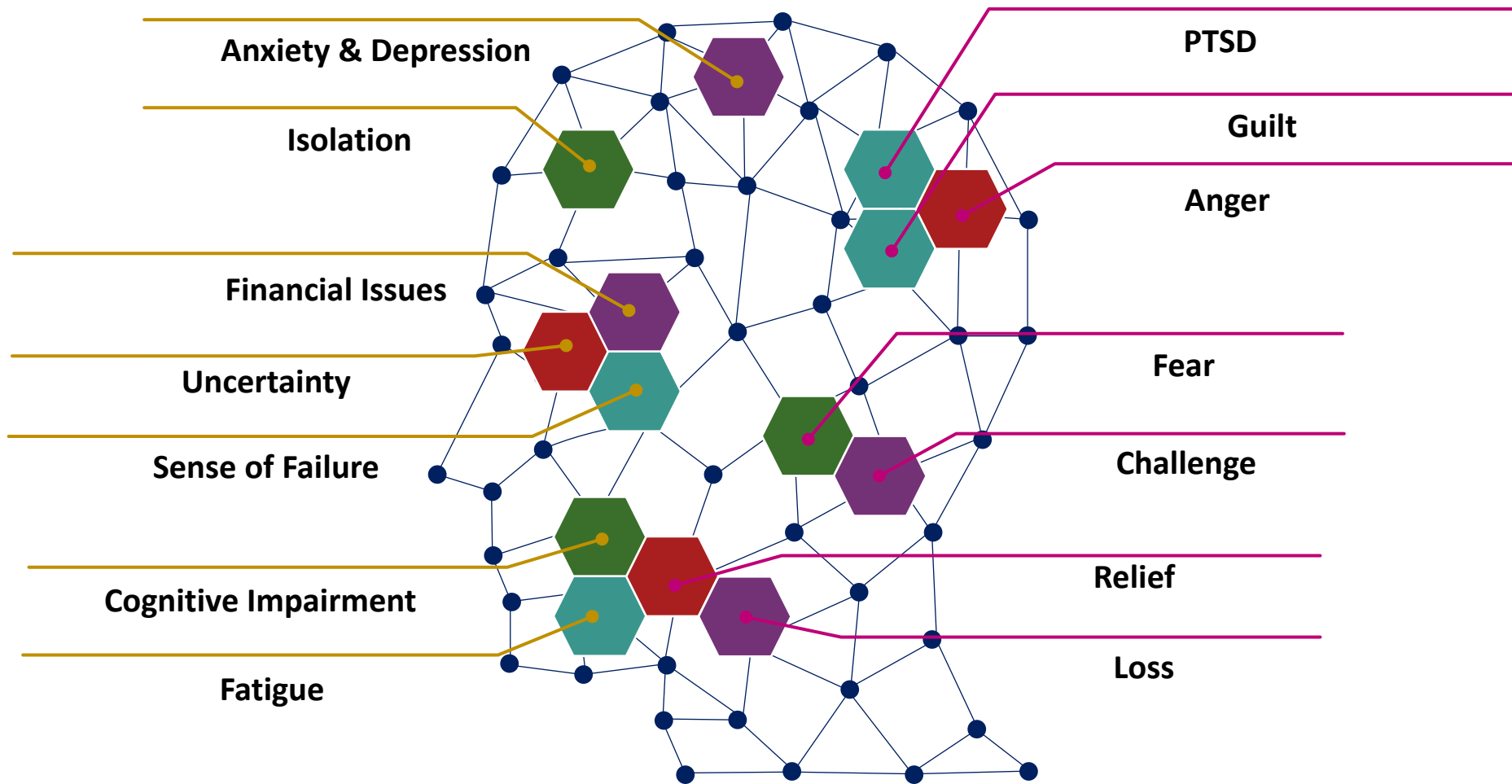
University Hospital Southampton





Diagnosis and treatment

# Common Reactions to Diagnosis & Treatment



# PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO DIAGNOSIS OF CANCER.

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## WHAT'S NORMAL?

- Initial shock, disbelief, panic, distress.
- Self limiting and resolves over days to weeks with support from family and friends.
- Recurrent overwhelming emotions which pass.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO DIAGNOSIS

- When do symptoms become a problem?
  - If you don't improve after a few weeks.
  - Persistent low mood.
  - Sense of loss.
  - Hopelessness.



# What can Predicts Psychological Distress?

High burden of disease

Disease progression

Lack of treatment options

Poor Social support

Low level of self efficacy

Poor Quality of life

Anxiety/depression

Use of mental health services

History of trauma

CANCER  
COMES INTO  
YOUR LIFE  
LIKE AN  
UNWELCOME  
GUEST.





Communicating with family and friends can be difficult.

Really 'helpful' comments!

Some people just can't cope with the distress.

People become less supportive over time.

Different coping styles.

Wanting to protect one another.

Feeling like a burden.



# I am a burden on my family(80% belief)

## **Evidence for**

- I can no longer do the housework.
- I just lie of the sofa.
- My children are running round after me.
- My husband has to bring me back to the hospital.

## **Evidence against**

- My family have not said I'm a burden.
- The children have not complained.
- They like to snuggle on the sofa with me.
- I can still help them with their homework and read to them.
- My husband says he doesn't mind driving me.

**(New rating: 50% belief)**

# WHAT PREVENTS PATIENTS FROM SHARING CONCERNS WITH DRs/NURSES?

- Beliefs that:
  - Drs/nurses are only interested in certain types of problems.
  - This is not the 'right' professional to talk to.
  - Staff are too busy.
  - You shouldn't get upset.
  - You will be judged.
  - Language barriers.
  - Cognitive impairment.
  - You can't record the consultation





- HOW DO WE MANAGE CANCER RELATED WORRIES?

NOTICE WHAT YOUR BRAIN IS DOING.







## CONTACT WITH THE PRESENT MOMENT

What happens if you get hooked by worries about the future or regrets about the past?

Mindfulness.



# DEFUSION EXERCISES

- I notice I'm having the thought that...
- Silly voice
- Singing thoughts
- Dropping an anchor

# Acceptance

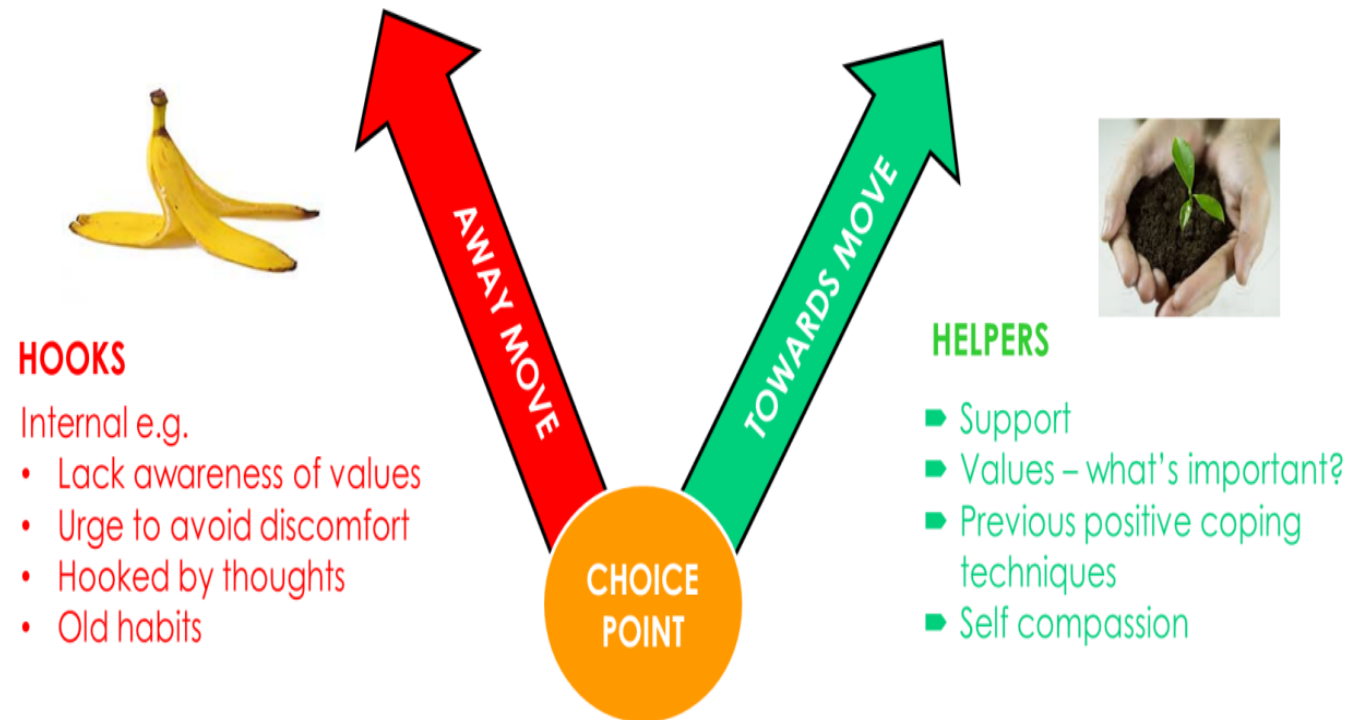
- Acceptance does not mean you like, want, enjoy, desire or approve of something
- It means you will allow it, make room for it or let it be, in order to do something that you value.
- The Beach Ball





# What is most important to you? - Values

- What change could you make that would bring you closer to a life that connects you to your values?



## The Motivation Trap –

Waiting until you feel like doing something is like putting the cart before the horse!





- Committed action
  - Set SMART goals
  - Lean in to the discomfort and do it anyway



## In summary....

- Practice defusion from your thoughts
  - Sing thoughts, notice thoughts, leaves on stream
- Present moment awareness
  - Practice mindfulness
- Acceptance of experience
  - Sit with the discomfort
- Focus on your values
- Take committed action towards those values

YOU CAN'T GET RID OF YOUR FEARS...  
BUT YOU CAN LEARN TO LIVE WITH THEM



Be kind to yourself!

