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## Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors

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# **Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors**

Andy S.K. Cheng<sup>1</sup>, Xiangyu Liu<sup>2</sup>, Peter H.F. Ng<sup>3</sup>, Cindy T.T. Kwok<sup>1</sup>, Yingchun Zeng<sup>4</sup>, Michael  
Feuerstein<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom,  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong  
Kong

<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>Professor (ret.), Consultant in Cancer Survivorship, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA, and Visiting  
Professor of Hunan Cancer Hospital, The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of  
Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

Correspondence to: Andy S.K. Cheng, PhD, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong  
Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong; fax number: (852) 2330 8656,  
telephone number: (852) 2766 5396, e-mail: andy.cheng@polyu.edu.hk

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**

The eHealth technologies that are being designed for chronic disease constitute a global trend for health assessment and self-management. However, most of these approaches only focus on a single symptom or problem rather than on the multiple problems that are characteristic of many of these chronic illnesses. The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management application (app) that identifies multiple problem areas related to surviving breast cancer as the chronic illness of interest.

**Methods and analysis**

This is a randomized controlled study. Eligible participants will be allocated randomly into either an intervention group or a control group, at a 1:1 ratio. The intervention group will be assigned to use a self-management app (“Be-with-You”), whereas the control group will use a General Health app (“Sham” app). The primary outcomes will include the differences between the two groups in their health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills. The secondary outcomes will include group differences in self-efficacy, readiness for change, and health-related quality of life (HRQoL). All of these outcomes will be measured at baseline and at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. In addition, usability of these two mobile apps will be measured at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The planned sample size is 488.

**Strengths and limitations of the study**

- This study will examine the effectiveness of a self-management app that identifies multiple problem areas related to breast cancer survivors.
- This study will provide an independent measure (i.e., not based on participant reporting) of access to and use of the two apps, by using an independent measure monitored by the app itself.
- This study is not intended to determine the specific effect of each app on change in the

specific problem over time. The outcome will measure and evaluate aspects of self-management and general outcomes (e.g., HRQoL).

- This study will only provide one type of specific self-management skill.

### **Ethics and dissemination**

The Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University approved the study (HSEARS20190922001, 24 September 2019). Dissemination of findings will apply to local, national and international levels.

### **Trial registration number**

ChiCTR1900026244

### **Keywords**

Breast cancer survivor, eHealth, self-management app, multiple problems

Word count: 4,855

**BACKGROUND**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cancer is one of the four major types of noncommunicable chronic disease (NCD) and the second leading cause of NCD-related deaths worldwide. In China, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed female cancer, with 367,900 newly diagnosed cases and 97,972 deaths [1] in 2018. However, the 5-year relative survival rate of female breast cancer increased from 73.1% in 2003-2005 to 82% in 2012-2015.[2] With further medical advancements, it is expected that the survival rate for women diagnosed with breast cancer will increase continuously over the next few decades. In China, The State Council has introduced a medium- to long-term plan called “Healthy China 2030” that aims at strengthening the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, reducing the financial burden of medical expenses, improving the average life expectancy, and improving the overall health condition of Chinese people by 2030.[3]

Breast cancer survivors often experience a wide range of unmet needs, including symptom burden.[4-6] Symptom burden is defined as the subjective, quantifiable prevalence, frequency, and severity of symptoms placing a physiologic burden on patients and producing multiple negative, physical, and emotional patient responses.[7] Much of the symptom burden in breast cancer survivors is related to medical treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and mastectomy. Cognitive dysfunction, lymphedema, fatigue, sexual dysfunction, anxiety, and depressive symptoms are problems that breast cancer survivors often report.[8] A systematic review of the literature indicates that symptoms that are present immediately after the completion of primary treatment for cancer can persist for more than 5 years.[9] Those symptoms significantly lower the survivors’ quality of life and functional outcomes, including work productivity.[10-14] A qualitative study has suggested that the post-treatment self-management needs of breast cancer survivors comprise five major areas: symptom management needs, emotional management needs, information acquisition needs, the need for a relationship with healthcare providers, and adaptation

needs.[15] Because symptoms and many other problems experienced by breast cancer survivors are personal and multifactorial, and because provider-based health care following primary treatment can often represent a challenge, patient-based self-management may provide significant assistance for enhancing the physical and psychological health and lifestyle aspects of breast cancer survivors, thus helping to provide them with much-needed comprehensive chronic health care.

The Chronic Care Model (CCM) and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Model (CDSMP) strongly urge the use of self-management in chronic disease. The CCM comprises six interacting elements (the health system, clinical information system, decision support, delivery system design, self-management support, and community resources for patients) that work together to fulfill the needs of patients with chronic illnesses.[16] The nature of the CCM requires greater involvement of healthcare professionals in primary care than the CDSMP does. Although existing resources, division of labor, and decision making at the level of senior management affect the implementation of the CCM,[17] the model also emphasizes the therapeutic alliance and collaborative decision-making among healthcare professionals, program leaders, and patients. Although the CCM has generated positive outcomes, its practicality in primary care has been challenged because frontline healthcare professionals report that high job demands leave them with minimal time for proactive care and necessary follow up.[17]

The CDSMP, on the other hand, is based on the social cognitive theory of Alfred Bandura, which aims at enhancing the self-efficacy of patients so that they can better manage their own disease.[18] In one study, six self-management skills: problem solving, decision making, resource utilization, the formation of a patient-provider partnership, action planning, and self-tailoring, were taught through a six-week group-based workshop by two trained leaders who were non-healthcare professionals and had a chronic disease.[19] However, the CDSMP has been criticized for its use of a restricted time frame, such as the six-week duration of the workshop. Also, the trained leaders



may have presuppositions that affect the delivery of the self-management information and can influence group dynamics.[20] The effectiveness of the CCM and the CDSMP on cancer survivors still remains to be definitively determined, because only a few existing studies have adopted them as interventions.[21] Whereas self-management is a common element of a CCM approach, the specific effect from that component remains unclear.[22]

Despite the lack of research on disease self management, eHealth technologies constitute a global trend to promote chronic disease self-management.[23] The approach is suggested to be used to minimize healthcare costs while also attending to multiple reported problems, potentially reducing the need for extensive involvement of healthcare professionals.[24] Recently, several mobile phone or tablet applications (apps) and web pages that target different symptom management goals, such as psychological adjustment, lymphedema symptom management, arm and shoulder exercises, dietary management, and weight management, have been specially designed for breast cancer survivors.[25-28] However, most of those apps and web pages have tended to focus on the assessment and/or management of a single symptom or problem area. Because many breast cancer survivors report multiple problems, the use of single-problem apps can be cumbersome when identifying and managing the patients’ multiple problems. Moreover, systematic reviews and meta-analyses of eHealth approaches for use with cancer survivors report the need for future research that will consider the use of approaches to multiple problem areas.[29,30]

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management app designed to address multiple problem areas for breast cancer survivors, in a large sample, and to record problem areas over time. The objectives are: 1) to examine whether there is a difference in the health literacy, problem-solving skills, readiness for change, self-efficacy, self-management skills, and health-related quality of life between the intervention group and the control group, and 2) to examine the usability of this self-management app versus that of a general

health app. We predict that there will be greater adherence to the active self-management app. We anticipate that those using it will have greater levels of health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-efficacy, thus resulting in higher readiness for change, an aspect of self-management skills, and health-related quality of life.

## METHODS

### Design

This study is to be a randomized controlled trial in which all participants are blinded to the study's two groups of app users (the intervention group and the control group) and are assigned to the groups at a 1:1 ratio. The study will be conducted in Hunan province, China, from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2021. The participants that are allocated to the intervention group will use the self-management "Be-with-You" app, and the participants in the control group will use a general health app.

### Be-with-You app

The Be-with-You app consists of two major parts. The first part is the Chinese version of the Cancer Survivor Profile for breast cancer survivors (CSPro-BC) [31] and includes a 71-item survey that was adapted from its original psychometrically sound Cancer Survivor Profile model.[32,33] It provides a self-assessment tool that can effectively identify 18 subscales within five problem domains and will automatically generate a profile for the patient to use to visualize her current condition. Oncology nurses will also provide guidance on the use of the app, along with problem-solving training.[33]

The participants' profiles will be generated according to three steps. (1) *Raw scores*: The app will first calculate raw scores for each of the 18 independent subscales of the five problem domains: the symptom burden domain (fatigue, fear of recurrence, anxiety, pain, body image, and depressive symptoms), the function domain (cognitive, social, work, sexual, and sleep), the health

behaviors domain (unhealthy diet and physical activity), the healthcare-seeking-skills domain (patient-provider communication, health information, healthcare competence, and information acquisition), and the domain of financial strain related to breast cancer. (2) *Standardized scores*: A z-score will first be calculated based on the following formula, in which the mean and standard deviation for each of the 18 subscales are generated, with reference to a group of 430 breast cancer survivors with a similar history of diagnosis and treatment.

$$z\ score = \frac{raw\ score - mean\ score\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}{standard\ deviation\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}.$$

Finally, a standardized score (*t*-score) will be calculated using the formula:

$$t\ score = (z - score * 10) + 50.$$

(3) *Generalization of the profile*: Each profile will be visualized according to color-based classifications.[32,33]

The second major part of the Be-with-You app is composed of self-learning e-resources, such as expert articles, a demonstration and training video, and referrals to local community organizations and providers. The resources have been developed using focus group discussions with BCS and various types of BCS providers to obtain suggestions of people or programs to be accessed by location and problem area, per the profile results. An app-based push notification feature will be incorporated to gently remind the participants of the need to regularly review their BCS profile and latest self-learning resources (Figure 1).

**General Health app (Sham app)**

The General Health app has been developed by putting together current health information that is typically given to breast cancer survivors to manage their health conditions. An app-based push notification feature will also be found in the general health app that reminds the patients to review different information that is of interest to them. Oncology nurses will also provide time to help orient the participants to this app.

Both apps will support major mobile platforms, such as iOS and Android, and will be installed on the participants' smartphones. In addition, both apps will automatically record usage-log data, including when and what the participants log into, as well as how long they review the different content of the app or have any other interaction with the app. By interacting with the app in these two ways, it is believed that the participants will personify the cycle of experiential learning by performing active engagement and self-reflection related to their self-management. All data received from the Be-with-You app and the General Health App will be stored on a centralized database server that will be hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and will significantly protect data privacy and will transfer data securely throughout the entire period of this proposed study.

### **Patient and public involvement**

The e-resources of both apps have been developed using focus group discussions with BCS and various types of BCS providers.

### **Eligibility criteria**

All participants will be recruited voluntarily from Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China.

### **Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria require that participants: 1) are female; 2) are breast cancer survivors; 3) have cancer that is stage I, II, or III; 4) have completed primary treatment within one year or longer; 5) are between 18 and 65 years of age; 6) have an acceptable literacy level (e.g., are able to read and write Chinese); 7) are agreeable to the study checking their mobile app's usage log; and 8) are able to provide informed consent.

### **Exclusion criteria**

The exclusion criteria require that participants: 1) have not been diagnosed with breast cancer and also with a severe mental illness; 2) do not have a diagnosis of another cancer type

rather than breast cancer; 3) have not previously participated in another clinical trial; and 4) have not used another self-management app to manage their breast cancer.

**Outcomes**

Primary and secondary outcomes will be measured for all participants at the study’s outset (for baseline data), and again at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. All measurements are selected based on their satisfactory construct validity and reliability and their availability in Chinese. A flow chart of screening, enrollment, interventions, and assessments is shown in Figure 2.

**Primary outcomes**

*Health literacy*

The Brief Health Literacy Screening (BHLS) is a three-item self-rated questionnaire that aims to detect the health literacy level of patients. All items are ranked on a 5-point rating scale, with total scores ranging from 3 to 15. A higher score indicates higher health literacy.[34]

*Problem-solving skills*

The Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Short Form (SPSI-R: S) is a 25-item self-assessment measure that evaluates an individual’s problem-solving orientation and problem solving performance. It is derived from the Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Full Form (SPSI-R), which consisted of 52-items.[35] The SPSI-R: S consists of five subscales: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Rational Problem Solving (RPS), Impulsivity/Carelessness Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 0 to 100. High scores on PPO and RPS and low scores on NPO, ICS, and AS indicate good social problem solving skills, and low PPO and RPS scores and high NPO, ICS, and AS scores indicate poor social problem-solving skills.[36]

### *Self-management skills*

One self-management skill will be assessed by the Brief Medication Adherence Scale (BMAS), which is a ten-item self-assessment measure of medication adherence behavior. It was designed to be administered to examine an individual's attitudes towards taking medication and medication adherence behavior during the past two weeks.[37] Each item is rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 to 10, resulting in a score range of 10-100 points for answering all 10 items. A higher score indicates higher level of medication adherence.[37]

### **Secondary outcomes**

#### *Self-efficacy*

The Self-Efficacy to Manage Chronic Disease Scale (SEMCD or SES6) is a six-item scale that has been developed for assessing an individual's self-efficacy for managing chronic disease and evaluates the effectiveness of chronic disease self-management programs.[38] Each item is rated on a 10-point scale, and the total score is the mean of the scale's six items and ranges from 1 to 10. A higher score indicates higher self-efficacy. The test has been demonstrated to have good validity and reliability in multiple studies.[39]

#### *Readiness for change*

The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale (URICA) is a 32-item self-report measure of readiness for change that is based on the transtheoretical therapy model (TTM).[40] The scale consists of four subscales that represent four stages of change (pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The total score of each subscale ranges from 7 to 35. Profile scores and readiness to change can be generated.[41]

#### *Health-related quality of life (HRQoL)*

The 12-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-12) is a simplified version of the Medical Outcomes Study 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36).[42] The Chinese version of the SF-

12 is a validated generic HRQoL instrument containing 12 items. It measures HRQoL through a Physical Component Summary (PCS) domain and a Mental Component Summary (MCS) domain, with higher scores reflecting better HRQoL.[43]

*Adherence to the mobile App*

With reference to previous studies, usage-log data will be collected using the apps’ usage monitoring system and will be assessed at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The user logs will contain time stamps for each function that are recorded whenever a participant uses that function.[44,45]

**Statistical plan**

*Power and sample size calculations*

The sample size was calculated using the statistical power analysis program G\*power version 3.1.0, with the alpha level at 0.05 and a study power of 80%. Participants in intervention groups in previous studies achieved a significant difference in their usability of an app, their quality of life, and their social problem solving skills when compared with the control subjects (effect sizes ranged from 0.2765 to 1.8533).[46,47] Thus, a smallest effect size of 0.2765 is estimated for between-group comparisons of the primary outcomes in this study, so the sample size will be 414. Presuming a dropout rate of 15%, 48 additional participants will be recruited. Thus, the planned sample size will be 488, with 244 subjects per group. That is a feasible sample size for a clinical trial with the required budget and proposed timeframe of this study.

*Data analysis*

All statistical analyses will be completed using the IBM SPSS statistical software package with a 5% level of significance (two-sided). The data will be double-entered for validation purposes. Data on all outcome measures will be analyzed on an intention-to-treat basis. The baseline characteristics of participants between the two groups will be compared using two samples and independent *t*-tests, chi-squared tests, or Fisher’s exact test, as appropriate. Mixed-

effects models will be used to compare the differential changes between the two groups in all outcome measures at different points in time. The strength of a mixed-effects model is that it accounts for intra-correlation between repeatedly measured data and accommodates missing data caused by dropouts, provided that the missing data are random. Two different approaches will be used to analyze usage-log data: the random-effects model will be used to observe changes in the app usage levels over time, and the Cox proportional hazard model will be used to observe changes in the probability of stopping use of the app.

## ETHICS AND DISSEMINATION

The study's design, research ethics, and safety considerations have been thoroughly examined. Ethical approval was granted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The trial has been registered on Chinese Clinical Trial Registry (<http://www.chictr.org.cn/searchprojen.aspx>). It is estimated that the trial will be completed in 2021, and the data analysis and dissemination of the results will be published afterward.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness and usability of a self-management computer application that identifies multiple problem areas related to surviving breast cancer. The app may also help breast cancer survivors to identify their local and community resources. It is hoped that the app will facilitate breast cancer survivors' self-awareness of their unmet needs and will enhance their health literacy. The ultimate goal will be to enhance the health-related quality of life of breast cancer survivors.

## Author affiliations

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom,



Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

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**Author’s contributors**

Contributors Cheng, Liu, and Feuerstein conceived the study, developed the study design, and drafted the manuscript. Contributor Ng developed the study design, provided expertise in the development of two apps. Contributors Kwok and Zeng participated in the study design, and in particular in the definition of outcomes. All authors contributed to the refinement of the study protocol and approved the final manuscript.

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**Competing interests**

None declared.

**Patient consent for publication**

Not required.

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Figure 1 Functionality of the Be-with-You App

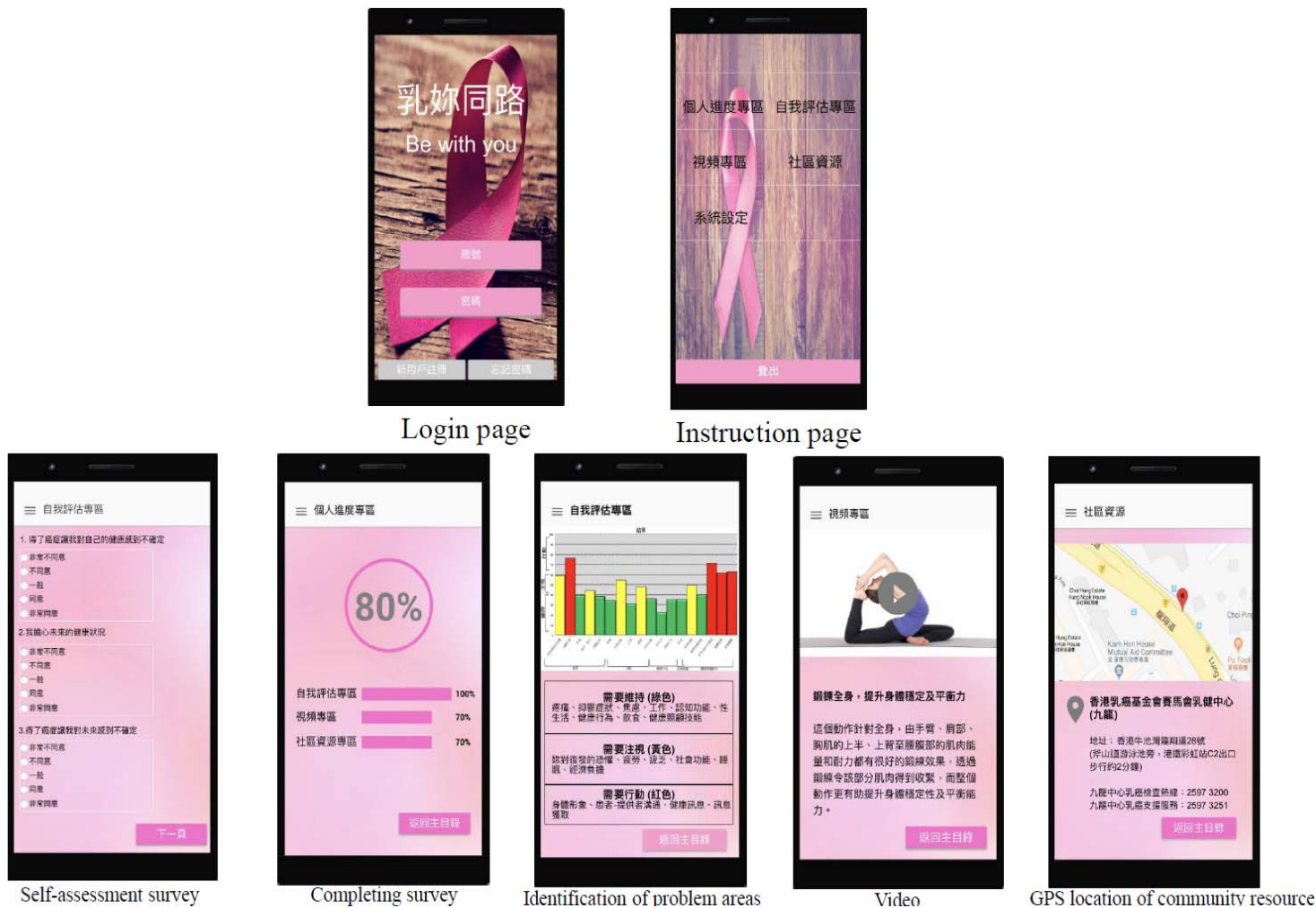
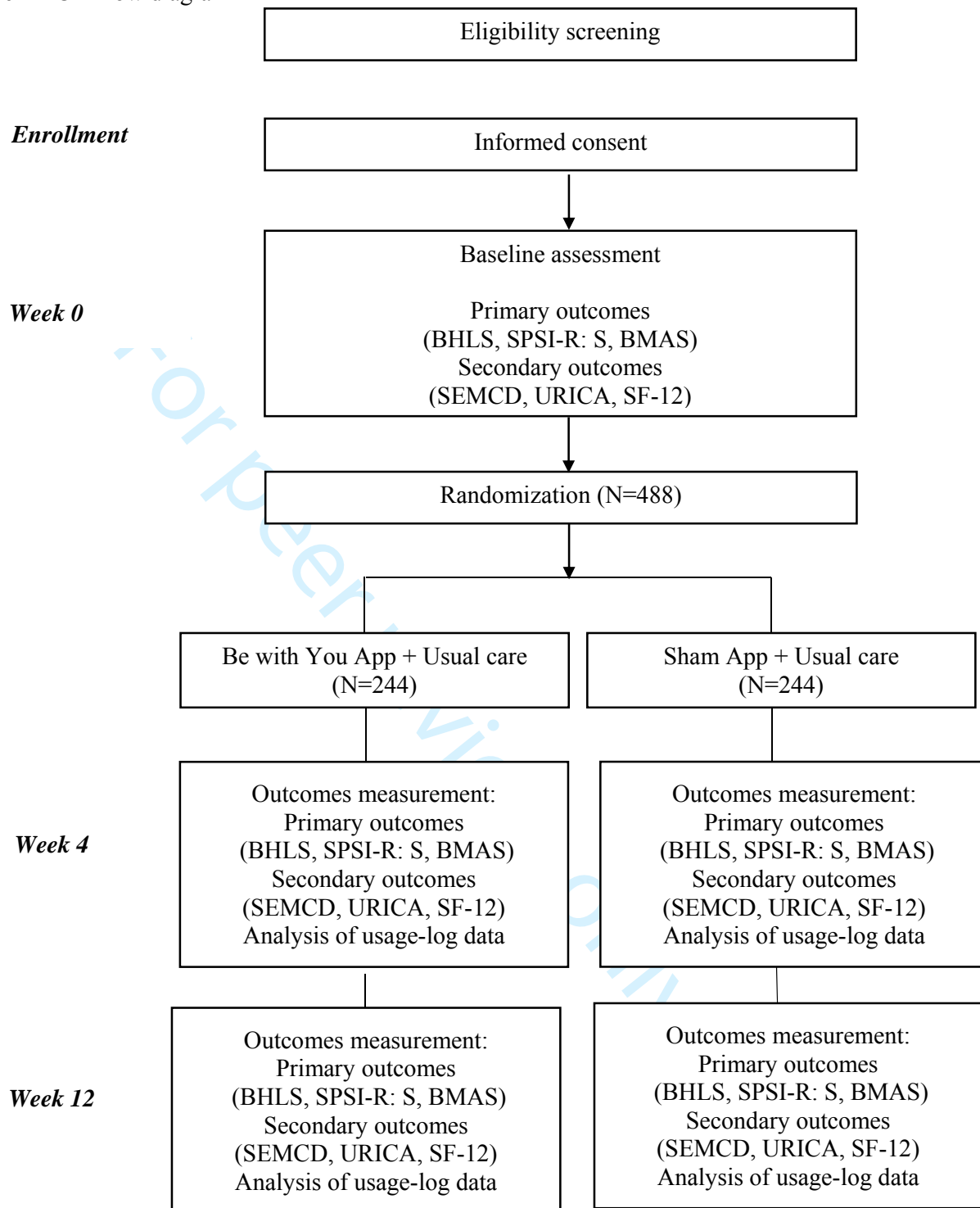




Figure 2 RCT Flow diagram





# BMJ Open

## Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors

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# **Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors**

Andy S.K. Cheng<sup>1</sup>, Xiangyu Liu<sup>2</sup>, Peter H.F. Ng<sup>3</sup>, Cindy T.T. Kwok<sup>1</sup>, Yingchun Zeng<sup>4</sup>, Michael Feuerstein<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>Professor (ret.), Consultant in Cancer Survivorship, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA, and Visiting Professor of Hunan Cancer Hospital, The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

Correspondence to: Andy S.K. Cheng, PhD, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong; fax number: (852) 2330 8656, telephone number: (852) 2766 5396, e-mail: andy.cheng@polyu.edu.hk

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**

The eHealth technologies that are being designed for chronic disease constitute a global trend toward health assessment and self-management. However, most of these approaches tend to focus on a single symptom or problem rather than on the multiple problems that are characteristic of many of these chronic illnesses. The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management application (app) that identifies multiple problem areas related to surviving breast cancer as the targeted chronic illness.

**Methods and analysis**

This is a randomized controlled study. Eligible participants will be allocated randomly into either an intervention group or a control group, at a 1:1 ratio. The intervention group will be assigned to the self-management app (“Be-with-You”), while the control group will use a General Health app (“Sham” app). The primary outcomes will include the differences between the two groups in their health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills. The secondary outcomes will include group differences in self-efficacy, readiness for change, and health-related quality of life (HRQoL). All of these outcomes will be measured at baseline and at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. In addition, usability of these two mobile apps will be measured at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The planned sample size is 476.

**Ethics and dissemination**

The Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University approved the study (HSEARS20190922001, 24 September 2019). Dissemination of findings will occur at the local, national and international levels.

### Strengths and limitations of the study

- This study will examine the effectiveness of a self-management app that identifies multiple problem areas related to breast cancer survivors.
- This study will provide independent assessment (i.e., not dependent on participant reporting) of access to and use of the two apps, through the use statistics monitored by the two apps.
- This study is not intended to determine the specific effect of each app on change in the specific problem over time. The outcome will measure the actual engagement with the two apps and the effects on self-management and general health related quality of life (e.g., HRQoL).
- This study will only provide one type of specific self-management skill (use of a tool that indicates potential problems areas experienced following treatment for breast cancer and provides information for follow up to access resources for identified problem areas).

### Trial registration number

ChiCTR1900026244

### Keywords

Breast cancer survivor, eHealth, self-management app, multiple problems

Word count: 5,377

**BACKGROUND**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cancer is one of the four major types of noncommunicable chronic disease (NCD) and the second leading cause of NCD-related deaths worldwide. In China, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed female cancer, with 367,900 newly diagnosed cases and 97,972 deaths [1] in 2018. However, the 5-year relative survival rate of female breast cancer increased from 73.1% in 2003-2005 to 82% in 2012-2015.[2] With further medical advancements, it is expected that the survival rate for women diagnosed with breast cancer will continue to increase over the next few decades. In China, The State Council has introduced a medium- to long-term plan called “Healthy China 2030” that aims at strengthening the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, reducing the financial burden of medical expenses, improving the average life expectancy, and enhancing the overall health of Chinese people by 2030.[3]

Breast cancer survivors often experience a wide range of unmet needs, including symptom burden.[4-6] Symptom burden is defined as the subjective, quantifiable prevalence, frequency, and severity of symptoms placing a physiologic burden on patients and producing multiple negative, physical, and emotional patient responses.[7] Much of the symptom burden in breast cancer survivors is related to medical treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and mastectomy. Cognitive dysfunction, lymphedema, fatigue, sexual dysfunction, anxiety, and depressive symptoms are problems that breast cancer survivors during and following primary treatment.[8] A systematic review of the literature indicates that symptoms that are present immediately after the completion of primary treatment for cancer can persist for more than 5 years.[9] Those symptoms can significantly lower the survivors’ quality of life and functional outcomes, including work productivity.[10-14] A qualitative study has suggested that the post-treatment self-management needs of breast cancer survivors comprise five major areas: symptom management needs, emotional management needs, information acquisition needs, the need for a relationship with healthcare providers, and adaptation needs.[15] Because symptoms and many other problems

experienced by breast cancer survivors are personal and multifactorial, and because provider-based health care following primary treatment can often represent a challenge, patient-based self-management in terms of improving the ability to identify and seek resources provide significant assistance for enhancing the physical and psychological health and reducing potential unhealthy lifestyle often related to surviving breast cancer, and help them to access needed comprehensive chronic health care that can better improve their overall quality of health.

The Chronic Care Model (CCM) and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Model (CDSMP) strongly urge the use of self-management in chronic disease. The CCM comprises six interacting elements (the health system, clinical information system, decision support, delivery system design, self-management support, and community resources for patients) that work together to fulfill the needs of patients with chronic illnesses.[16] The nature of the CCM requires greater involvement of healthcare professionals and patients in primary care than the CDSMP does. Although existing resources, division of labor, and decision making at the level of senior management affect the implementation of the CCM,[17] the model also emphasizes the therapeutic alliance and collaborative decision-making among healthcare professionals, program leaders, and patients. Although the CCM has generated positive outcomes, its practicality in primary care has been challenged because frontline healthcare professionals report that high job demands leave them with minimal time for proactive care and necessary follow up.[17]

The CDSMP, on the other hand, is based on the social cognitive theory, which aims at enhancing the self-efficacy of patients so that they can better manage their own disease.[18] In one study, six self-management skills: problem solving, decision making, resource utilization, the formation of a patient-provider partnership, action planning, and self-tailoring, were taught through a six-week group-based workshop by two trained leaders who were non-healthcare professionals and had a chronic disease.[19] The CDSMP has been criticized for its use of a restricted time frame, such as the six-week duration of the workshop. Also, trained leaders may

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2  
3 have presuppositions that affect the delivery of the self-management information and therefore  
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5 could have influenced group dynamics.[20] The effectiveness of the CCM and the CDSMP on  
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7 cancer survivors still remains to be definitively determined, because only a few existing studies  
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9 have adopted them as interventions.[21] Whereas patient activation and a self-management  
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11 approach is a common element of a CCM approach and may assist with the time demands  
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13 characteristics of primary care. The specific effect of a version of self-management directed at  
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15 identifying and providing resources to address the identified problem areas as reported by patients  
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17 remains unclear.[22]  
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22 Despite the lack of research on disease self-management, eHealth technologies constitute  
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24 a global trend to promote chronic disease self-management.[23] The approach is suggested to be  
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26 used to minimize healthcare costs while also attending to multiple reported problems, potentially  
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28 reducing the need for extensive involvement of healthcare professionals.[24] Recently, several  
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30 mobile phone or tablet applications (apps) and web pages that target different symptom  
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32 management goals, such as psychological adjustment, lymphedema symptom management, arm  
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34 and shoulder exercises, dietary management, and weight management, have been specially  
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36 designed for breast cancer survivors.[25-28] However, most of those apps and web pages have  
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38 tended to focus on the assessment and/or management of a single symptom or problem area.  
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40 Because many breast cancer survivors report multiple problems, the use of many single-problem  
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42 apps especially immediately following treatment can be stressful and cumbersome when  
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44 identifying and managing the patients' multiple problems. BENECA mHealth app developed by  
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46 Lozano-Lozano and colleagues has highlighted the importance of the use of mobile apps to address  
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48 breast cancer survivors' multiple problems in order to motivate them to adhere to healthier  
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50 lifestyles [29, 30]. Moreover, systematic reviews and meta-analyses of eHealth approaches for use  
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52 with cancer survivors report the need for future research that will consider the use of different  
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54 approaches to multiple problem areas.[31,32]  
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The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management app designed to address multiple problem areas for breast cancer survivors, in a large sample. The objectives are: 1) to examine whether there is a difference in the health literacy, problem-solving skills, readiness for change, self-efficacy, self-management skills, and health-related quality of life between the intervention group and the control group, and 2) to examine the usability of this self-management app versus that of a general health app. We predict that there will be greater adherence to the active self-management app. We also anticipate that those using it will have greater levels of health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-efficacy, thus resulting in higher readiness for change, an aspect of self-management skills, and overall health-related quality of life.

## METHODS

### Design

This study is to be a randomized controlled trial in which all participants are blinded to the study's two groups of app users (the intervention group and the control group) and are assigned to the groups at a 1:1 ratio. The study will be conducted in Hunan province, China, from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2021. The participants that are allocated to the intervention group will use the self-management "Be-with-You" app, and the participants in the control group will use a general health app.

### Be-with-You app

The "Be-with-You" app consists of two major parts. The first part is the Chinese version of the Cancer Survivor Profile for breast cancer survivors (CSPro-BC) [33] and includes a 71-item survey that was adapted from its original psychometrically sound Cancer Survivor Profile model.[34,35] It provides a self-assessment tool that can effectively identify 18 subscales within five problem domains and will automatically generate a profile for the patient to use to visualize

her current condition. Oncology nurses will also provide guidance on the use of the app, along with problem-solving training.[35]

The participants’ profiles will be generated according to three steps. (1) *Raw scores*: The app will first calculate raw scores for each of the 18 independent subscales of the five problem domains: the symptom burden domain (fatigue, fear of recurrence, anxiety, pain, body image, and depressive symptoms), the function domain (cognitive, social, work, sexual, and sleep), the health behaviors domain (unhealthy diet and physical activity), the healthcare-seeking-skills domain (patient-provider communication, health information, healthcare competence, and information acquisition), and the domain of financial strain related to breast cancer. (2) *Standardized scores*: A z-score will first be calculated based on the following formula, in which the mean and standard deviation for each of the 18 subscales are generated, with reference to a group of 444 breast cancer survivors with a similar history of diagnosis and treatment who we had recruited in previous study. [33]

$$z\ score = \frac{raw\ score - mean\ score\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}{standard\ deviation\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}.$$

Finally, a standardized score (*t*-score) will be calculated using the formula:

$$t\ score = (z - score * 10) + 50.$$

(3) *Generalization of the profile*: Each scale in the profile will be visualized either: 1) as a potential problem area to follow up on, 2) a value of score that is in the “average range”, or 3) a value of the score on a given scale that is “below average” and does not need to be followed up on. Each of the three ranges are indicated by color-based classifications: red-do something about; yellow-keep an eye on it; and green-just go about your life.[34,35]

The second major part of the “Be-with-You” app is composed of self-learning e-resources, such as expert articles, video to demonstrate how to use the app, different types of exercise to improve physical functioning, stress management, weight and diet, etc and referrals to local community organizations and providers. The resources have been developed and content validated

through focus group discussions with BCS themselves and other stakeholders including various types of BCS providers to obtain suggestions of people or programs to be accessed by location and problem area, per the profile results. An app-based push notification feature will be incorporated to gently remind the participants of the need to regularly review their BCS profile and latest self-management resources (Figure 1).

### **General Health app (Sham app)**

The General Health app has been developed by putting together current health information that is typically given to breast cancer survivors to manage their health conditions. An app-based push notification feature will also be found in the general health app that reminds the patients to review different information that is of interest to them. Oncology nurses will also provide time to help orient the participants to this app.

Both apps will support both major mobile platforms, such as iOS and Android, and will be installed on the participants' smartphones during the first outpatient visit. In addition, both apps will automatically record usage-log data, including when and what the participants log into, as well as how long they review the different content of the app or have any other interaction with the app. By interacting with the app in these two ways, it is believed that the participants will individualize their cycle of experiential learning by performing active engagement related to their self-management. All data received from the "Be-with-You" app and the General Health App will be stored on a centralized database server that is hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and will significantly protect data privacy and will transfer data securely throughout the entire period of this proposed study.

### **Patient and public involvement**

The e-resources of both apps have been identified using focus group discussions with BCS and various types of BCS providers coupled with the use of evidence-based resources.

**Eligibility criteria**

All participants will be recruited voluntarily from Hunan Cancer Hospital – The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University (<http://en.hnszlyy.com/index.html>). It is a provincial institute for cancer treatment and research. In 2017, the Hospital has 1,490 beds. It had 16,870 operations on inpatients and 372,781 outpatient attendances. Each year, there are about 2,500 new cases of breast cancer in this hospital.

**Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria require that participants: 1) are female; 2) are breast cancer survivors post treatment and discharged from the Hunan Cancer Hospital; 3) have cancer that is stage I, II, or III; 4) have completed primary treatment within one year or longer but less than 3 years; 5) are between 18 and 65 years of age; 6) have an acceptable literacy level (e.g., are able to read and write Chinese); 7) have a smartphone; 8) are agreeable to the study requirement of monitoring their mobile app’s usage log; and 9) are able to provide informed consent.

**Exclusion criteria**

The exclusion criteria require that participants: 1) with reported history of severe mental illness including schizophrenia, bipolar depression, etc; 2) no cancer diagnosis other than breast cancer; 3) no previously participation in clinical trial; and 4) not used another self-management app to manage breast cancer short or long term effects.

**Outcomes**

Primary and secondary outcomes will be measured for all participants at the study’s outset (for baseline data), and again at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. All measurements are selected based on their satisfactory construct validity and reliability. A flow chart of screening, enrollment, interventions, and assessments is shown in Figure 2.

**Primary outcomes**

*Health literacy*

The Brief Health Literacy Screening (BHLS) is a three-item self-rated questionnaire that aims to detect the health literacy level of patients. All items are ranked on a 5-point rating scale, with total scores ranging from 3 to 15. A higher score indicates higher health literacy.[36]

#### *Problem-solving skills*

The Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Short Form (SPSI-R: S) is a 25-item self-assessment measure that evaluates an individual's problem-solving orientation and problem solving performance. It is derived from the Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Full Form (SPSI-R), which consisted of 52-items.[37] The SPSI-R: S consists of five subscales: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Rational Problem Solving (RPS), Impulsivity/Carelessness Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 0 to 100. High scores on PPO and RPS and low scores on NPO, ICS, and AS indicate good social problem solving skills, and low PPO and RPS scores and high NPO, ICS, and AS scores indicate poor social problem-solving skills.[38]

#### *Self-management skills*

One self-management skill will be assessed by the Brief Medication Adherence Scale (BMAS), which is a ten-item self-assessment measure of medication adherence behavior. It was designed to be administered to examine an individual's attitudes towards taking medication and medication adherence behavior during the past two weeks.[39] Each item is rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 to 10, resulting in a score range of 10-100 points for answering all 10 items. A higher score indicates higher level of medication adherence.[39]

### **Secondary outcomes**

#### *Self-efficacy*

The Self-Efficacy to Manage Chronic Disease Scale (SEMCD or SES6) is a six-item scale that has been developed for assessing an individual's self-efficacy for managing chronic disease and evaluates the effectiveness of chronic disease self-management programs.[40] Each item is

rated on a 10-point scale, and the total score is the mean of the scale’s six items and ranges from 1 to 10. A higher score indicates higher self-efficacy. The test has been demonstrated to have good validity and reliability in multiple studies.[41]

*Readiness for change*

The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale (URICA) is a 32-item self-report measure of readiness for change that is based on the transtheoretical therapy model (TTM).[42] The scale consists of four subscales that represent four stages of change (pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The total score of each subscale ranges from 7 to 35. Profile scores and readiness to change can be generated.[43]

*Health-related quality of life (HRQoL)*

The 12-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-12) is a simplified version of the Medical Outcomes Study 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36).[44] The Chinese version of the SF-12 is a validated generic HRQoL instrument containing 12 items. It measures HRQoL through a Physical Component Summary (PCS) domain and a Mental Component Summary (MCS) domain, with higher scores reflecting better HRQoL.[45].

*Adherence to the mobile app*

With reference to previous studies, usage-log data will be collected using the apps’ usage monitoring system and will be assessed at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The user logs will contain time stamps for each function that are recorded whenever a participant uses that function.[46,47]

*Perceived usability of the mobile app*

The mHealth App Usability Questionnaire (MAUQ) for standalone mHealth app (patient version) is an 18-item scale to measure user’s perceived usability and satisfaction of the mobile app. It measures three domains namely Ease of Use (5 items), Interface and Satisfaction (7 items)

and Usefulness (6 items). All items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly agree and 7 meaning strongly disagree. A lower score indicates higher perceived usability.[48]

## Statistical plan

### *Power and sample size calculations*

The sample size was calculated using the statistical power analysis program G\*power version 3.1.0, with the alpha level at 0.05 and a study power of 80%. Participants in intervention groups in previous studies achieved a significant difference in their usability of an app, their quality of life, and their social problem solving skills when compared with the control subjects (effect sizes ranged from 0.2765 to 1.8533).[49,50] Thus, a smallest effect size of 0.2765 is estimated for between-group comparisons of the primary outcomes in this study, so the sample size will be 414. Presuming a dropout rate of 15%, 62 additional participants will be recruited. Thus, the planned sample size will be 476, with 238 participants per group. In addition, we will have three research students to help follow up the participants in order to minimize the dropout rate. That is a feasible sample size for a clinical trial with the required budget and proposed timeframe of this study.

### *Data analysis*

All statistical analyses will be completed using the IBM SPSS statistical software package with a 5% level of significance (two-sided). The data will be double-entered for validation purposes. Data on all outcome measures will be analyzed on an intention-to-treat basis. The baseline characteristics of participants between the two groups will be compared using two samples and independent *t*-tests, chi-squared tests, or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. Mixed-effects models will be used to compare the differential changes between the two groups in all outcome measures at different points in time. The strength of a mixed-effects model is that it accounts for intra-correlation between repeatedly measured data and accommodates missing data caused by dropouts, provided that the missing data are random. Two different approaches will be used to analyze usage-log data: the random-effects model will be used to observe changes in the

app usage levels over time, and the Cox proportional hazard model will be used to observe changes in the probability of stopping use of the app.

**ETHICS AND DISSEMINATION**

The study’s design, research ethics, and safety considerations have been thoroughly examined. Ethical approval was granted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The trial has been registered on Chinese Clinical Trail Registry (<http://www.chictr.org.cn/searchprojen.aspx>). It is estimated that the trial will be completed in 2021, and the data analysis and dissemination of the results will be published afterward.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness and usability of a self-management app that identifies multiple problem areas often experienced by those surviving breast cancer following diagnosis and treatment. The app may also help breast cancer survivors increase access to resources including local and community resources. It is hoped that the app will improve breast cancer survivors’ self-awareness of their unmet needs, overall health literacy and facilitate their problem solving skills and self-management. The ultimate goal is to improve overall health-related quality of life of breast cancer survivors.

**Author affiliations**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong



<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

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### **Author's contributors**

Contributors Cheng, Liu, and Feuerstein conceived the study, developed the study design, and drafted the manuscript. Contributor Ng developed the study design, provided expertise in the development of two apps. Contributors Kwok and Zeng participated in the study design, and in particular in the definition of outcomes. All authors contributed to the refinement of the study protocol and approved the final manuscript.

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### **Competing interests**

None declared.

### **Patient consent for publication**

Not required.

### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

### **Open access**

This is an open-access article.

### **Data sharing statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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Figure 1: Functionality of the “Be-with-You” App

Figure 2: RCT Flow diagram

Figure 1 Functionality of the “Be-with-You” App

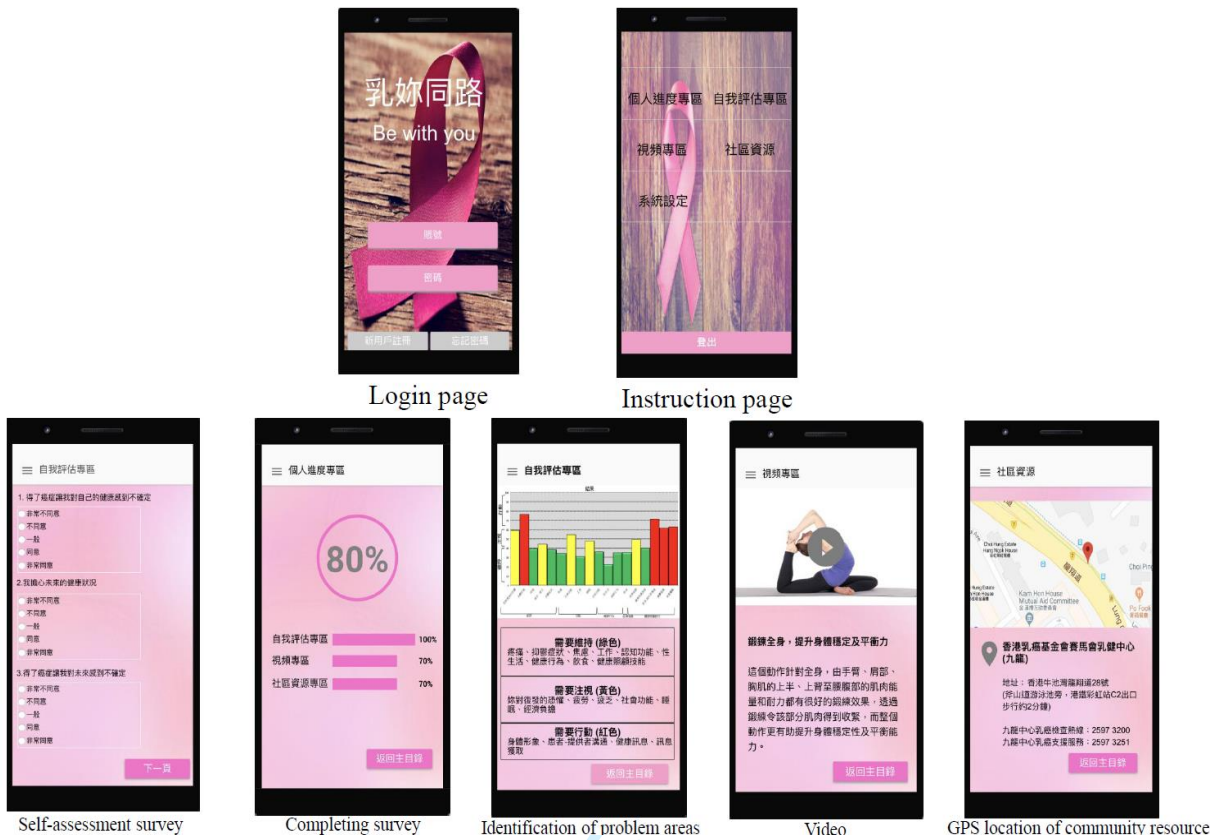
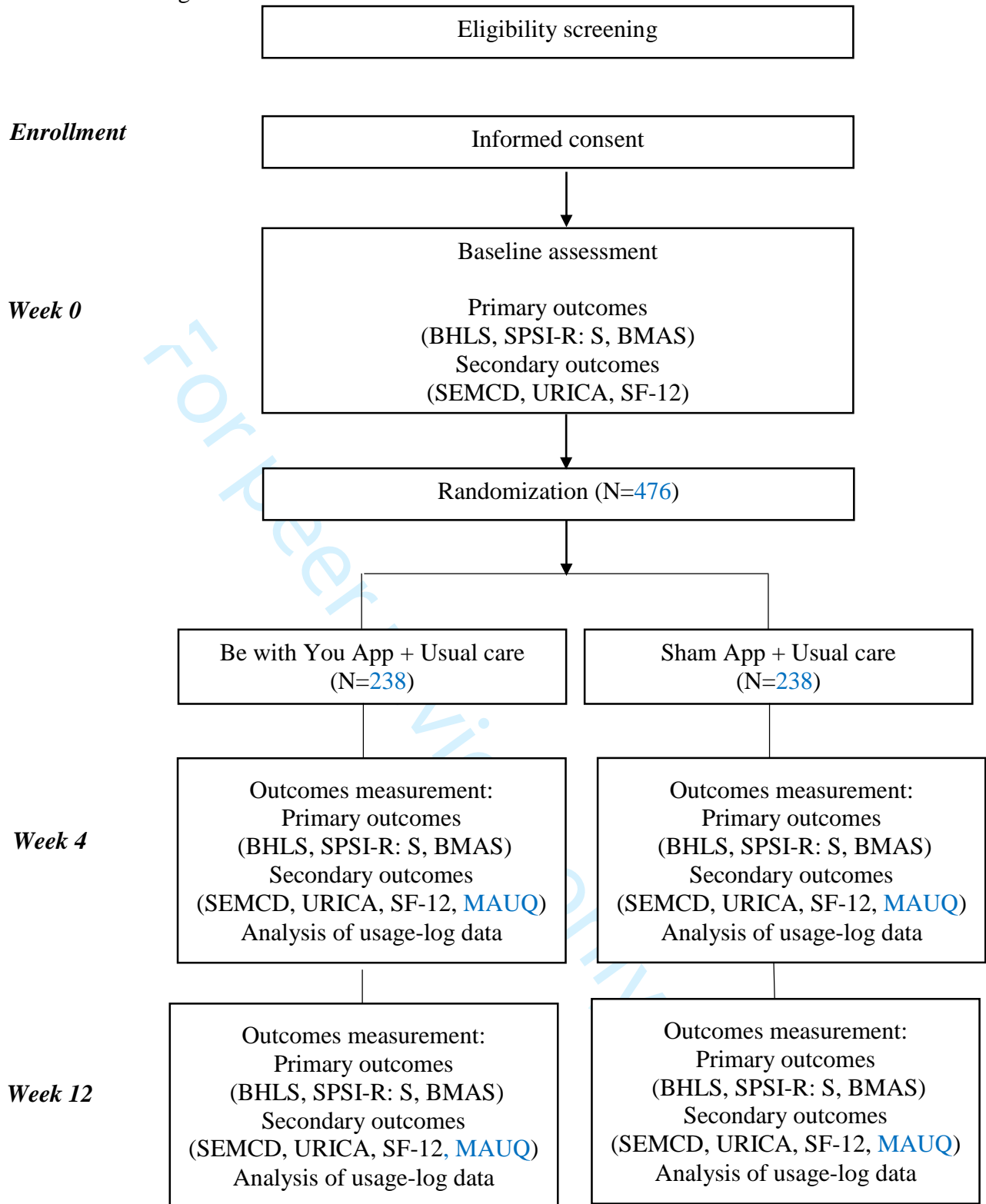




Figure 2 RCT Flow diagram



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# SPRIT CHECKLIST

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# BMJ Open

## Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors

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# **Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors**

Andy S.K. Cheng<sup>1</sup>, Xiangyu Liu<sup>2</sup>, Peter H.F. Ng<sup>3</sup>, Cindy T.T. Kwok<sup>1</sup>, Yingchun Zeng<sup>4</sup>, Michael Feuerstein<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>Professor (ret.), Consultant in Cancer Survivorship, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA, and Visiting Professor of Hunan Cancer Hospital, The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

Correspondence to: Andy S.K. Cheng, PhD, Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong; fax number: (852) 2330 8656, telephone number: (852) 2766 5396, e-mail: andy.cheng@polyu.edu.hk

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**

The eHealth technologies that are being designed for chronic disease constitute a global trend toward health assessment and self-management. However, most of these approaches tend to focus on a single symptom or problem rather than on the multiple problems that are characteristic of many of these chronic illnesses. The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management application (app) that identifies multiple problem areas related to surviving breast cancer as the targeted chronic illness.

**Methods and analysis**

This is a randomized controlled study. Eligible participants will be allocated randomly into either an intervention group or a control group, at a 1:1 ratio. The intervention group will be assigned to the self-management app (“Be-with-You”), while the control group will use a General Health app (“Sham” app). The primary outcomes will include the differences between the two groups in their health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills. The secondary outcomes will include group differences in self-efficacy, readiness for change, and health-related quality of life (HRQoL). All of these outcomes will be measured at baseline and at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. In addition, usability of these two mobile apps will be measured at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The planned sample size is 476.

**Ethics and dissemination**

The Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University approved the study (HSEARS20190922001, 24 September 2019). Dissemination of findings will occur at the local, national and international levels.

### Strengths and limitations of the study

- This study will examine the effectiveness of a self-management app that identifies multiple problem areas related to breast cancer survivors.
- This study will provide independent assessment (i.e., not dependent on participant reporting) of access to and use of the two apps, through the use statistics monitored by the two apps.
- This study is not intended to determine the specific effect of each app on change in the specific problem over time. The outcome will measure the actual engagement with the two apps and the effects on self-management and general health related quality of life (e.g., HRQoL).
- This study will only provide one type of specific self-management skill (use of a tool that indicates potential problems areas experienced following treatment for breast cancer and provides information for follow up to access resources for identified problem areas).

### Trial registration number

ChiCTR1900026244

### Keywords

Breast cancer survivor, eHealth, self-management app, multiple problems

Word count: 5,293

**BACKGROUND**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), cancer is one of the four major types of noncommunicable chronic disease (NCD) and the second leading cause of NCD-related deaths worldwide. In China, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed female cancer, with 367,900 newly diagnosed cases and 97,972 deaths [1] in 2018. However, the 5-year relative survival rate of female breast cancer increased from 73.1% in 2003-2005 to 82% in 2012-2015.[2] With further medical advancements, it is expected that the survival rate for women diagnosed with breast cancer will continue to increase over the next few decades. In China, The State Council has introduced a medium- to long-term plan called “Healthy China 2030” that aims at strengthening the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, reducing the financial burden of medical expenses, improving the average life expectancy, and enhancing the overall health of Chinese people by 2030.[3]

Breast cancer survivors often experience a wide range of unmet needs, including symptom burden.[4-6] Symptom burden is defined as the subjective, quantifiable prevalence, frequency, and severity of symptoms placing a physiologic burden on patients and producing multiple negative, physical, and emotional patient responses.[7] Much of the symptom burden in breast cancer survivors is related to medical treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and mastectomy. Cognitive dysfunction, lymphedema, fatigue, sexual dysfunction, anxiety, and depressive symptoms are problems that breast cancer survivors during and following primary treatment.[8] A systematic review of the literature indicates that symptoms that are present immediately after the completion of primary treatment for cancer can persist for more than 5 years.[9] Those symptoms can significantly lower the survivors’ quality of life and functional outcomes, including work productivity.[10-14] A qualitative study has suggested that the post-treatment self-management needs of breast cancer survivors comprise five major areas: symptom management needs, emotional management needs, information acquisition needs, the need for a relationship with healthcare providers, and adaptation needs.[15] Because symptoms and many other problems



experienced by breast cancer survivors are personal and multifactorial, and because provider-based health care following primary treatment can often represent a challenge, patient-based self-management in terms of improving the ability to identify and seek resources provide significant assistance for enhancing the physical and psychological health and reducing potential unhealthy lifestyle often related to surviving breast cancer, and help them to access needed comprehensive chronic health care that can better improve their overall quality of health.

The Chronic Care Model (CCM) and the Chronic Disease Self-Management Model (CDSMP) strongly urge the use of self-management in chronic disease. The CCM comprises six interacting elements (the health system, clinical information system, decision support, delivery system design, self-management support, and community resources for patients) that work together to fulfill the needs of patients with chronic illnesses.[16] The nature of the CCM requires greater involvement of healthcare professionals and patients in primary care than the CDSMP does. Although existing resources, division of labor, and decision making at the level of senior management affect the implementation of the CCM,[17] the model also emphasizes the therapeutic alliance and collaborative decision-making among healthcare professionals, program leaders, and patients. Although the CCM has generated positive outcomes, its practicality in primary care has been challenged because frontline healthcare professionals report that high job demands leave them with minimal time for proactive care and necessary follow up.[17]

The CDSMP, on the other hand, is based on the social cognitive theory, which aims at enhancing the self-efficacy of patients so that they can better manage their own disease.[18] In one study, six self-management skills: problem solving, decision making, resource utilization, the formation of a patient-provider partnership, action planning, and self-tailoring, were taught through a six-week group-based workshop by two trained leaders who were non-healthcare professionals and had a chronic disease.[19] The CDSMP has been criticized for its use of a restricted time frame, such as the six-week duration of the workshop. Also, trained leaders may

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3 have presuppositions that affect the delivery of the self-management information and therefore  
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5 could have influenced group dynamics.[20] The effectiveness of the CCM and the CDSMP on  
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7 cancer survivors still remains to be definitively determined, because only a few existing studies  
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9 have adopted them as interventions.[21] Whereas patient activation and a self-management  
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11 approach is a common element of a CCM approach and may assist with the time demands  
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13 characteristics of primary care. The specific effect of a version of self-management directed at  
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15 identifying and providing resources to address the identified problem areas as reported by patients  
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17 remains unclear.[22]  
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22 Despite the lack of research on disease self-management, eHealth technologies constitute  
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24 a global trend to promote chronic disease self-management.[23] The approach is suggested to be  
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26 used to minimize healthcare costs while also attending to multiple reported problems, potentially  
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28 reducing the need for extensive involvement of healthcare professionals.[24] Recently, several  
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30 mobile phone or tablet applications (apps) and web pages that target different symptom  
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32 management goals, such as psychological adjustment, lymphedema symptom management, arm  
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34 and shoulder exercises, dietary management, and weight management, have been specially  
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36 designed for breast cancer survivors.[25-28] However, most of those apps and web pages have  
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38 tended to focus on the assessment and/or management of a single symptom or problem area.  
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40 Because many breast cancer survivors report multiple problems, the use of many single-problem  
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42 apps especially immediately following treatment can be stressful and cumbersome when  
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44 identifying and managing the patients' multiple problems. BENECA mHealth app developed by  
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46 Lozano-Lozano and colleagues has highlighted the importance of the use of mobile apps to address  
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48 breast cancer survivors' multiple problems in order to motivate them to adhere to healthier  
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50 lifestyles [29, 30]. Moreover, systematic reviews and meta-analyses of eHealth approaches for use  
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52 with cancer survivors report the need for future research that will consider the use of different  
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54 approaches to multiple problem areas.[31,32]  
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The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management app designed to address multiple problem areas for breast cancer survivors, in a large sample. The objectives are: 1) to examine whether there is a difference in the health literacy, problem-solving skills, readiness for change, self-efficacy, self-management skills, and health-related quality of life between the intervention group and the control group, and 2) to examine the usability of this self-management app versus that of a general health app. We predict that there will be greater adherence to the active self-management app. We also anticipate that those using it will have greater levels of health literacy, problem-solving skills, and self-efficacy, thus resulting in higher readiness for change, an aspect of self-management skills, and overall health-related quality of life.

## METHODS

### Design

This study is to be a randomized controlled trial in which all participants are blinded to the study's two groups of app users (the intervention group and the control group) and are assigned to the groups at a 1:1 ratio by computer-generated random numbers, implemented by a research assistant. The study will be conducted in Hunan province, China, from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2021. The participants that are allocated to the intervention group will use the self-management "Be-with-You" app, and the participants in the control group will use a general health app.

### Be-with-You app

The "Be-with-You" app consists of two major parts. The first part is the Chinese version of the Cancer Survivor Profile for breast cancer survivors (CSPRO-BC) [33] and includes a 71-item survey that was adapted from its original psychometrically sound Cancer Survivor Profile model.[34,35] It provides a self-assessment tool that can effectively identify 18 subscales within five problem domains and will automatically generate a profile for the patient to use to visualize

her current condition. Oncology nurses will also provide guidance on the use of the app, along with problem-solving training.[35]

The participants’ profiles will be generated according to three steps. (1) *Raw scores*: The app will first calculate raw scores for each of the 18 independent subscales of the five problem domains: the symptom burden domain (fatigue, fear of recurrence, anxiety, pain, body image, and depressive symptoms), the function domain (cognitive, social, work, sexual, and sleep), the health behaviors domain (unhealthy diet and physical activity), the healthcare-seeking-skills domain (patient-provider communication, health information, healthcare competence, and information acquisition), and the domain of financial strain related to breast cancer. (2) *Standardized scores*: A z-score will first be calculated based on the following formula, in which the mean and standard deviation for each of the 18 subscales are generated, with reference to a group of 444 breast cancer survivors with a similar history of diagnosis and treatment who we had recruited in previous study. [33]

$$z\ score = \frac{raw\ score - mean\ score\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}{standard\ deviation\ of\ previous\ BCS\ cases}.$$

Finally, a standardized score (*t*-score) will be calculated using the formula:

$$t\ score = (z - score * 10) + 50.$$

(3) *Generalization of the profile*: Each scale in the profile will be visualized either: 1) as a potential problem area to follow up on, 2) a value of score that is in the “average range”, or 3) a value of the score on a given scale that is “below average” and does not need to be followed up on. Each of the three ranges are indicated by color-based classifications: red-do something about; yellow-keep an eye on it; and green-just go about your life.[34,35]

The second major part of the “Be-with-You” app is composed of self-learning e-resources, such as expert articles, video to demonstrate how to use the app, different types of exercise to improve physical functioning, stress management, weight and diet, etc and referrals to local community organizations and providers. The resources have been developed and content validated

through focus group discussions with BCS themselves and other stakeholders including various types of BCS providers to obtain suggestions of people or programs to be accessed by location and problem area, per the profile results. An app-based push notification feature will be incorporated to gently remind the participants of the need to regularly review their BCS profile and latest self-management resources (Figure 1).

### **General Health app (Sham app)**

The General Health app has been developed by putting together current health information that is typically given to breast cancer survivors to manage their health conditions. An app-based push notification feature will also be found in the general health app that reminds the patients to review different information that is of interest to them. Oncology nurses will also provide time to help orient the participants to this app.

Both apps will support both major mobile platforms, such as iOS and Android, and will be installed on the participants' smartphones during the first outpatient visit. In addition, both apps will automatically record usage-log data, including when and what the participants log into, as well as how long they review the different content of the app or have any other interaction with the app. By interacting with the app in these two ways, it is believed that the participants will individualize their cycle of experiential learning by performing active engagement related to their self-management. All data received from the "Be-with-You" app and the General Health App will be stored on a centralized database server that is hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and will significantly protect data privacy and will transfer data securely throughout the entire period of this proposed study.

### **Patient and public involvement**

The e-resources of both apps have been identified using focus group discussions with BCS and various types of BCS providers coupled with the use of evidence-based resources.

**Eligibility criteria**

All participants will be recruited voluntarily from Hunan Cancer Hospital – The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University (<http://en.hnszllyy.com/index.html>). It is a provincial institute for cancer treatment and research. In 2017, the Hospital has 1,490 beds. It had 16,870 operations on inpatients and 372,781 outpatient attendances. Each year, there are about 2,500 new cases of breast cancer in this hospital.

**Inclusion criteria**

The inclusion criteria require that participants: 1) are female; 2) are breast cancer survivors post treatment and discharged from the Hunan Cancer Hospital; 3) have cancer that is stage I, II, or III; 4) have completed primary treatment within one year or longer but less than 3 years; 5) are between 18 and 65 years of age; 6) have an acceptable literacy level (e.g., are able to read and write Chinese); 7) have a smartphone; 8) are agreeable to the study requirement of monitoring their mobile app’s usage log; and 9) are able to provide informed consent.

**Exclusion criteria**

The exclusion criteria require that participants: 1) with reported history of severe mental illness including schizophrenia, bipolar depression, etc; 2) no cancer diagnosis other than breast cancer; 3) no previously participation in clinical trial; and 4) not used another self-management app to manage breast cancer short or long term effects.

**Outcomes**

Primary and secondary outcomes will be measured for all participants at the study’s outset (for baseline data), and again at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. All measurements are selected based on their satisfactory construct validity and reliability. A flow chart of screening, enrollment, interventions, and assessments is shown in Figure 2.

**Primary outcomes**

*Health literacy*

The Brief Health Literacy Screening (BHLS) is a three-item self-rated questionnaire that aims to detect the health literacy level of patients. All items are ranked on a 5-point rating scale, with total scores ranging from 3 to 15. A higher score indicates higher health literacy.[36]

#### *Problem-solving skills*

The Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Short Form (SPSI-R: S) is a 25-item self-assessment measure that evaluates an individual's problem-solving orientation and problem solving performance. It is derived from the Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Full Form (SPSI-R), which consisted of 52-items.[37] The SPSI-R: S consists of five subscales: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Rational Problem Solving (RPS), Impulsivity/Carelessness Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 0 to 100. High scores on PPO and RPS and low scores on NPO, ICS, and AS indicate good social problem solving skills, and low PPO and RPS scores and high NPO, ICS, and AS scores indicate poor social problem-solving skills.[38]

#### *Self-management skills*

One self-management skill will be assessed by the Brief Medication Adherence Scale (BMAS), which is a ten-item self-assessment measure of medication adherence behavior. It was designed to be administered to examine an individual's attitudes towards taking medication and medication adherence behavior during the past two weeks.[39] Each item is rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 to 10, resulting in a score range of 10-100 points for answering all 10 items. A higher score indicates higher level of medication adherence.[39]

### **Secondary outcomes**

#### *Self-efficacy*

The Self-Efficacy to Manage Chronic Disease Scale (SEMCD or SES6) is a six-item scale that has been developed for assessing an individual's self-efficacy for managing chronic disease and evaluates the effectiveness of chronic disease self-management programs.[40] Each item is

rated on a 10-point scale, and the total score is the mean of the scale’s six items and ranges from 1 to 10. A higher score indicates higher self-efficacy. The test has been demonstrated to have good validity and reliability in multiple studies.[41]

*Readiness for change*

The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale (URICA) is a 32-item self-report measure of readiness for change that is based on the transtheoretical therapy model (TTM).[42] The scale consists of four subscales that represent four stages of change (pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The total score of each subscale ranges from 7 to 35. Profile scores and readiness to change can be generated.[43]

*Health-related quality of life (HRQoL)*

The 12-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-12) is a simplified version of the Medical Outcomes Study 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36).[44] The Chinese version of the SF-12 is a validated generic HRQoL instrument containing 12 items. It measures HRQoL through a Physical Component Summary (PCS) domain and a Mental Component Summary (MCS) domain, with higher scores reflecting better HRQoL.[45].

*Adherence to the mobile app*

With reference to previous studies, usage-log data will be collected using the apps’ usage monitoring system and will be assessed at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The user logs will contain time stamps for each function that are recorded whenever a participant uses that function.[46,47]

*Perceived usability of the mobile app*

The mHealth App Usability Questionnaire (MAUQ) for standalone mHealth app (patient version) is an 18-item scale to measure user’s perceived usability and satisfaction of the mobile app. It measures three domains namely Ease of Use (5 items), Interface and Satisfaction (7 items)



and Usefulness (6 items). All items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly agree and 7 meaning strongly disagree. A lower score indicates higher perceived usability.[48]

## Statistical plan

### *Power and sample size calculations*

The sample size was calculated using the statistical power analysis program G\*power version 3.1.0, with the alpha level at 0.05 and a study power of 80%. Participants in intervention groups in previous studies achieved a significant difference in their usability of an app, their quality of life, and their social problem solving skills when compared with the control subjects (effect sizes ranged from 0.2765 to 1.8533).[49,50] Thus, a smallest effect size of 0.2765 is estimated for between-group comparisons of the primary outcomes in this study, so the sample size will be 414. Presuming a dropout rate of 15%, 62 additional participants will be recruited. Thus, the planned sample size will be 476, with 238 participants per group. In addition, we will have three research students to help follow up the participants in order to minimize the dropout rate. That is a feasible sample size for a clinical trial with the required budget and proposed timeframe of this study.

### *Data analysis*

All statistical analyses will be completed using the IBM SPSS statistical software package with a 5% level of significance (two-sided). The data will be double-entered for validation purposes. Data on all outcome measures will be analyzed on an intention-to-treat basis. The baseline characteristics of participants between the two groups will be compared using two samples and independent *t*-tests, chi-squared tests, or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate. Mixed-effects models will be used to compare the differential changes between the two groups in all outcome measures at different points in time. The strength of a mixed-effects model is that it accounts for intra-correlation between repeatedly measured data and accommodates missing data caused by dropouts, provided that the missing data are random. Two different approaches will be used to analyze usage-log data: the random-effects model will be used to observe changes in the

app usage levels over time, and the Cox proportional hazard model will be used to observe changes in the probability of stopping use of the app.

**ETHICS AND DISSEMINATION**

The study’s design, research ethics, and safety considerations have been thoroughly examined. Ethical approval was granted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The trial has been registered on Chinese Clinical Trail Registry (<http://www.chictr.org.cn/searchprojen.aspx>). It is estimated that the trial will be completed in 2021, and the data analysis and dissemination of the results will be published afterward.

**Author affiliations**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>2</sup>Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

<sup>4</sup>The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China

<sup>5</sup>The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China

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### **Author's contributions**

Contributors Cheng, Liu, and Feuerstein conceived the study, and developed the study design. Contributors Cheng, Liu, Feuerstein, and Kwok drafted the manuscript. Contributor Ng developed the study design, provided expertise in the development of two apps. Contributors Kwok and Zeng participated in the study design, and in particular in the definition of outcomes. All authors contributed to the refinement of the study protocol and approved the final manuscript.

### **Funding**

This project has been funded by the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (project number ZVMW).

### **Competing interests**

None declared.

### **Patient consent for publication**

Not required.

### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

### **Open access**

This is an open-access article.

### **Data sharing statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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13 **Figure legend:**

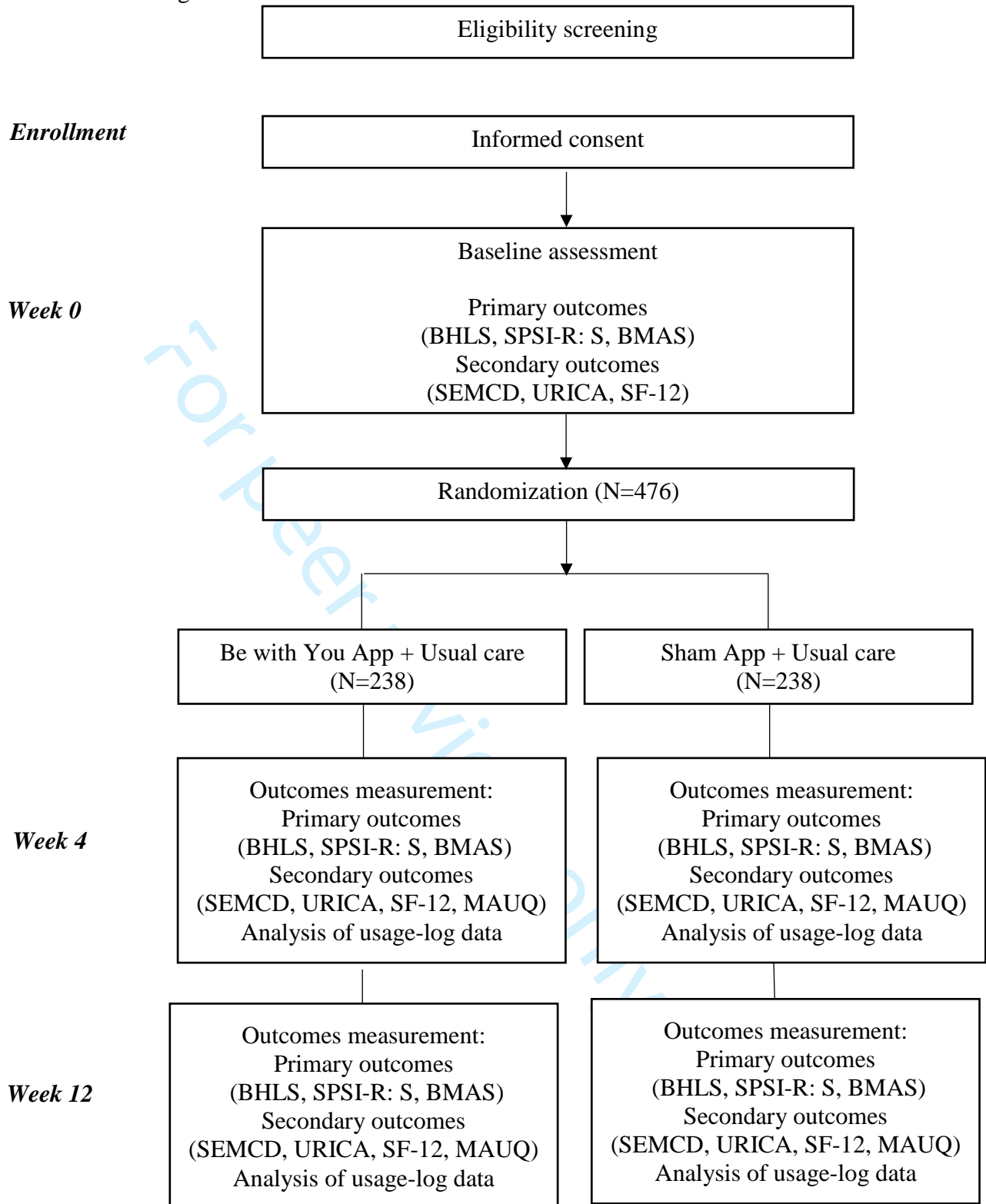
14 Figure 1 Functionality of Be-with-You App  
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17 Figure 2 RCT Flow diagram  
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Figure 1 Functionality of the “Be-with-You” App



Figure 2 RCT Flow diagram



SPRIT 2013 Checklist

Section/item	Item No	Description
Administrative information		
Title (page 1)	1	Breast cancer application protocol: A randomized controlled trial to evaluate a self-management app for breast cancer survivors.
Trial registration (page 3)	2a	ChiCTR1900026244 (Chinese Clinical Trial Registry)
	2b	n/a
Protocol version	3	Version 2
Funding (page 15)	4	This project has been funded by the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (project number ZVMW).
Roles and responsibilities (page 1 & 15)	5a	<u>Name of protocol contributors:</u> Andy S.K. Cheng <sup>1</sup> , Xiangyu Liu <sup>2</sup> , Peter H.F. Ng <sup>3</sup> , Cindy T.T. Kwok <sup>1</sup> , Yingchun Zeng <sup>4</sup> , Michael Feuerstein <sup>5</sup> <u>Affiliations:</u> <sup>1</sup> Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong <sup>2</sup> Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China <sup>3</sup> Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong <sup>4</sup> The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China <sup>5</sup> Professor (ret.), Consultant in Cancer Survivorship, Gaithersburg, Maryland, USA, and Visiting Professor of Hunan Cancer Hospital, The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China <u>Roles of protocol contributors:</u> Cheng, Liu, and Feuerstein conceived the study, developed the study design, and drafted the manuscript. Contributor Ng developed the study design, provided expertise in the development of two apps. Contributors Kwok and Zeng participated in the study design, and in particular in the definition of outcomes. All authors contributed to the refinement of the study protocol and approved the final manuscript.
	5b	n/a
	5c	Nil
	5d	Department of Rehabilitation Sciences and Department of Computing, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong (data management & overseeing the trial). Department of Nursing, Hunan Cancer Hospital, Changsha, China (coordinating centre, overseeing the trial, & data management).

		The Third Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China & The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University, Changsha, China (overseeing the trial)
<b>Introduction</b>		
Background and rationale (page 2)	6a	The eHealth technologies that are being designed for chronic disease constitute a global trend toward health assessment and self-management. However, most of these approaches tend to focus on a single symptom or problem rather than on the multiple problems that are characteristic of many of these chronic illnesses.
	6b	n/a
Objectives (page 7)	7	This study is to examine the effectiveness of and adherence to a self-management application (app) that identifies multiple problem areas related to surviving breast cancer as the targeted chronic illness.
Trial design (page 7)	8	This is a randomized controlled study. Eligible participants will be allocated randomly into either an intervention group or a control group, at a 1:1 ratio.
<b>Methods: Participants, interventions, and outcomes</b>		
Study setting (page 10)	9	All participants will be recruited voluntarily from Hunan Cancer Hospital – The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University
Eligibility criteria (page 10)	10	<u>Inclusion criteria:</u> The inclusion criteria require that participants: 1) are female; 2) are breast cancer survivors post treatment and discharged from the Hunan Cancer Hospital; 3) have cancer that is stage I, II, or III; 4) have completed primary treatment within one year or longer but less than 3 years; 5) are between 18 and 65 years of age; 6) have an acceptable literacy level (e.g., are able to read and write Chinese); 7) have a smartphone; 8) are agreeable to the study requirement of monitoring their mobile app's usage log; and 9) are able to provide informed consent. <u>Exclusion criteria:</u> The exclusion criteria require that participants: 1) with reported history of severe mental illness including schizophrenia, bipolar depression, etc; 2) no cancer diagnosis other than breast cancer; 3) no previously participation in clinical trial; and 4) not used another self-management app to manage breast cancer short or long term effects.
Interventions (page 7-9)	11a	The participants that are allocated to the intervention group will use the self-management "Be-with-You" app, and the participants in the control group will use a general health app.

	11b	Termination of the participation upon verbal request
Page 9	11c	An app-based push notification feature will be incorporated to gently remind the participants to use the app.
	11d	n/a
Outcomes (page 10-13)	12	<p><u>Primary outcomes:</u></p> <p><i>Health literacy</i></p> <p>The Brief Health Literacy Screening (BHLS) is a three-item self-rated questionnaire that aims to detect the health literacy level of patients. All items are ranked on a 5-point rating scale, with total scores ranging from 3 to 15. A higher score indicates higher health literacy.</p> <p><i>Problem-solving skills</i></p> <p>The Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Short Form (SPSI-R: S) is a 25-item self-assessment measure that evaluates an individual's problem-solving orientation and problem solving performance. It is derived from the Social Problem-Solving Inventory Revised-Full Form (SPSI-R), which consisted of 52-items. The SPSI-R: S consists of five subscales: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Rational Problem Solving (RPS), Impulsivity/Carelessness Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 0 to 100. High scores on PPO and RPS and low scores on NPO, ICS, and AS indicate good social problem solving skills, and low PPO and RPS scores and high NPO, ICS, and AS scores indicate poor social problem-solving skills.</p> <p><i>Self-management skills</i></p> <p>One self-management skill will be assessed by the Brief Medication Adherence Scale (BMAS), which is a ten-item self-assessment measure of medication adherence behavior. It was designed to be administered to examine an individual's attitudes towards taking medication and medication adherence behavior during the past two weeks. Each item is rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 to 10, resulting in a score range of 10-100 points for answering all 10 items. A higher score indicates higher level of medication adherence.</p> <p><u>Secondary outcomes:</u></p> <p><i>Self-efficacy</i></p> <p>The Self-Efficacy to Manage Chronic Disease Scale (SEMCD or SES6) is a six-item scale that has been developed for assessing an individual's self-efficacy for managing chronic disease and evaluates the effectiveness of chronic disease self-management programs. Each item is rated on a 10-point scale, and the total score is the mean of the scale's six items and ranges from 1 to 10.</p>

		<p>A higher score indicates higher self-efficacy. The test has been demonstrated to have good validity and reliability in multiple studies.</p> <p><i>Readiness for change</i></p> <p>The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment Scale (URICA) is a 32-item self-report measure of readiness for change that is based on the transtheoretical therapy model (TTM). The scale consists of four subscales that represent four stages of change (pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The total score of each subscale ranges from 7 to 35. Profile scores and readiness to change can be generated.</p> <p><i>Health-related quality of life (HRQoL)</i></p> <p>The 12-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-12) is a simplified version of the Medical Outcomes Study 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36). The Chinese version of the SF-12 is a validated generic HRQoL instrument containing 12 items. It measures HRQoL through a Physical Component Summary (PCS) domain and a Mental Component Summary (MCS) domain, with higher scores reflecting better HRQoL.</p> <p><i>Adherence to the mobile app</i></p> <p>With reference to previous studies, usage-log data will be collected using the apps' usage monitoring system and will be assessed at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. The user logs will contain time stamps for each function that are recorded whenever a participant uses that function.</p> <p><i>Perceived usability of the mobile app</i></p> <p>The mHealth App Usability Questionnaire (MAUQ) for standalone mHealth app (patient version) is an 18-item scale to measure user's perceived usability and satisfaction of the mobile app. It measures three domains namely Ease of Use (5 items), Interface and Satisfaction (7 items) and Usefulness (6 items). All items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly agree and 7 meaning strongly disagree. A lower score indicates higher perceived usability.</p>
Participant timeline	13	See figure 2.
Sample size (page 13)	14	The sample size was calculated using the statistical power analysis program G*power version 3.1.0, with the alpha level at 0.05 and a study power of 80%. Participants in intervention groups in previous studies achieved a significant difference in their usability of an app, their quality of life, and their social problem solving skills when compared with the



		control subjects (effect sizes ranged from 0.2765 to 1.8533). Thus, a smallest effect size of 0.2765 is estimated for between-group comparisons of the primary outcomes in this study, so the sample size will be 414. Presuming a dropout rate of 15%, 62 additional participants will be recruited. Thus, the planned sample size will be 476, with 238 participants per group. In addition, we will have three research students to help follow up the participants in order to minimize the dropout rate. That is a feasible sample size for a clinical trial with the required budget and proposed timeframe of this study.
Recruitment (page 10)	15	All participants will be recruited voluntarily from Hunan Cancer Hospital – The Affiliated Cancer Hospital of Xiangya School of Medicine, Central South University ( <a href="http://en.hnszlyy.com/index.html">http://en.hnszlyy.com/index.html</a> ). It is a provincial institute for cancer treatment and research. In 2017, the Hospital has 1,490 beds. It had 16,870 operations on inpatients and 372,781 outpatient attendances. Each year, there are about 2,500 new cases of breast cancer in this hospital.
<b>Methods: Assignment of interventions (for controlled trials)</b>		
Allocation:		
Sequence generation (page 7)	16a	Two groups of app users (the intervention group and the control group) and are assigned to the groups at a 1:1 ratio by computer-generated random numbers.
Allocation concealment mechanism (page 7)	16b	All participants are blinded to the study’s two groups of app users.
Implementation (page 7)	16c	Implemented by research assistant.
Blinding (masking) (page 7)	17a	All participants are blinded to the study’s two groups of app users.
	17b	n/a
<b>Methods: Data collection, management, and analysis</b>		
Data collection methods (page 10)	18a	Primary and secondary outcomes will be measured for all participants at the study’s outset (for baseline data), and again at 4 weeks and 12 weeks post-intervention. All measurements are selected based on their satisfactory construct validity and reliability. A flow chart of screening, enrollment, interventions, and assessments is shown in figure 2.
(Page 9)	18b	An app-based push notification feature will be incorporated to gently remind the participants to use the app.



Data management (page 9)	19	All data received from the “Be-with-You” app and the General Health App will be stored on a centralized database server that is hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
Statistical methods (page 13-14)	20a	All statistical analyses will be completed using the IBM SPSS statistical software package with a 5% level of significance (two-sided). The data will be double-entered for validation purposes. Data on all outcome measures will be analyzed on an intention-to-treat basis. The baseline characteristics of participants between the two groups will be compared using two samples and independent <i>t</i> -tests, chi-squared tests, or Fisher’s exact test, as appropriate. Mixed-effects models will be used to compare the differential changes between the two groups in all outcome measures at different points in time. The strength of a mixed-effects model is that it accounts for intra-correlation between repeatedly measured data and accommodates missing data caused by dropouts, provided that the missing data are random. Two different approaches will be used to analyze usage-log data: the random-effects model will be used to observe changes in the app usage levels over time, and the Cox proportional hazard model will be used to observe changes in the probability of stopping use of the app.
	20b	n/a
	20c	n/a
<b>Methods: Monitoring</b>		
Data monitoring	21a	This study is independent from the sponsor and competing interests
	21b	n/a
Harms	22	n/a
Auditing	23	n/a
<b>Ethics and dissemination</b>		
Research ethics approval (page 14)	24	The study’s design, research ethics, and safety considerations have been thoroughly examined. Ethical approval was granted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The trial has been registered on Chinese Clinical Trial Registry ( <a href="http://www.chictr.org.cn/searchprojen.aspx">http://www.chictr.org.cn/searchprojen.aspx</a> ).
Protocol amendments	25	n/a
Consent or assent (page 10)	26a	All participants have to provide informed consent.
	26b	n/a
Confidentiality (page 9)	27	All data received from the “Be-with-You” app and the General Health App will be stored on a centralized database server that is hosted by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and will

		significantly protect data privacy and will transfer data securely throughout the entire period of this proposed study.
Declaration of interests (page 15)	28	None declared.
Access to data (page 15)	29	The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.
Ancillary and post-trial care	30	n/a
Dissemination policy (page 14)	31a	Data analysis and dissemination of the results will be published afterward.
	31b	n/a
	31c	n/a
<b>Appendices</b>		
Informed consent materials	32	See supplementary file.
Biological specimens	33	n/a