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Abstract Category: Travail de recherche / Research work  
Preference: Présenter un poster / Present a poster

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## 2. Exploring coping strategies among people living with scleroderma through focus groups: A Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network Study

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**Objectives:** Systemic sclerosis (scleroderma; SSc) is a chronic and rare connective tissue disease with negative physical and psychological implications. Coping strategies used by SSc patients are currently not well understood. The objective of the present study was to gain a greater understanding of the coping strategies employed by people living with SSc.

**Method:** Three semi-structured focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 22 people with SSc recruited primarily through the Scleroderma Society of Ontario in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed using content analysis. Strategies of coping were explored through Lazarus and Folkman's theoretical model of coping, including: 1) problem-focused coping, 2) emotion-focused coping, and 3) meaning-focused coping.

**Results:** The findings indicated that people with SSc employed a combination of problem-focused (i.e., using professional psychological support; seeking disease-related information), emotion-focused (i.e., social support; adaptive distraction techniques; avoidance techniques), and meaning-focused coping strategies (i.e., benefit finding; cognitive reappraisal; positive thoughts and affirmations) to help them cope with and manage their SSc.

**Conclusion:** This study provided insight into the strategies of coping used by a group of patients with SSc to help them manage their disease. Interventions and support resources capable of helping people with SSc learn how to effectively cope with the disease must be developed and made accessible to patients.