



Measuring Distress in Cancer Patients: A Cancer Distress Screening with a Cancer-specific Questionnaire

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Abstract:

Aims: To assess the psychological distress of cancer patients in a disease-specific manner as well as the demographic, social, financial and medical variables that have an impact on the distress.

Method: 115 patients were randomly selected from patients admitted for chemotherapy treatment in the Oncology Department, UHC of Tirana. Two questionnaires: 1-NCCN Distress Thermometer and Problem List for Patients and 2-Specific questionnaire regarding patient’s financial status were administered to all the patients.

Results and Discussion: Patients with unmet needs showed significantly higher psychological and symptom distress for most needs. From the explored demographic factors (gender, residence, age, and education), only age has a main effect upon depression (depression increasing with age), while education is the only factor from those analysed, which has a moderator effect. Regarding the analysed intra-individual variables, only dysfunctional attitudes, emotion-focused coping, and lack of emotional support from the family have main effects upon the level of depression (i.e., higher levels of dysfunctional attitudes, emotion-focused coping, and loneliness are associated with higher levels of depression), while neither of them has a moderator effect on the relationship between knowing the diagnosis and depression. We also found that financial distress was associated with overall distress.

Conclusion: Cancer-specific distress questionnaires give a more precise insight into patients' experience than general or psychiatric questionnaires. Coordinated psychosocial care may benefit cancer patients with significant distress. NCCN tool helps to assess the severity of patients' distress and to determine the need for intervention.

Keywords

Cancer Patient, Distress, Screening Instruments, Depression