

Screening for Distress and Resource Utilization in Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patients

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Purpose

About one-third of people newly diagnosed with cancer experience elevated levels of psychosocial distress. However, distress screening is not widely adopted in routine clinical practice due to barriers such as lack of time and experience (Hawkes et al., 2010). Few studies have examined patients' utilization of resources to manage distress or barriers to resource access. This study examined the level and sources of distress in newly diagnosed cancer patients.

Methods

A convenience sample of newly diagnosed patients completed the NCCN'S Distress Thermometer and Problem Checklist at baseline and four weeks. The scale (36 items) ranged from 0 to 10 (0 = No Distress, and 10 = Extreme Distress). A score of 4 indicates concerns. Participants with a score of 4 or higher were provided with targeted resources for additional information and support.

Sample

A total of 43 patients provided baseline data and 28 completed follow-up assessment at four-week. The mean age was 64.75 years ($sd = 14.98$), 59% were female, and 52% were White/Caucasians.

Results

At baseline, more than half of the participants were clinically distressed. Sixty-nine percent attributed their distress to physical problems and 44% to emotional problems compared to 83% and 55%, respectively at follow-up assessment. A statistically significant difference was found for practical problems, specifically for transportation at baseline and follow-up ($t = 2.121$ ($df = 27$), $p = .043$). Overall access of resource utilization were relatively low due to physical symptoms and practical issues.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, the outpatient cancer treatment have adopted the distress screening tool for psychosocial distress assessment as a routine clinical practice. Future research should consider strategy to reduce barriers for accessing available resources to manage patients' concerns.

Goals and Objectives

- To investigate efficient methods to screen for psychological distress in cancer patients using short screening tools.
- Identifying patients with heightened levels of distress and the sources of distress will benefit patients and allow healthcare practitioners to provide appropriate interventions and referrals.