A Distress Thermometer Intervention for Patients With Head and Neck Cancer

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OBJECTIVES: To investigate the feasibility of an intervention using the National Comprehensive Cancer Network Distress Thermometer and Problem List with nurse-guided follow-up and the effect on depressive symptoms, health-related quality of life, and worry of cancer in patients with head and neck cancer.


METHODS & VARIABLES: Patients were randomized to usual care (n = 57) or the intervention group (n = 53), which consisted of screening with the Distress Thermometer and Problem List plus nurse-guided follow-up lasting about 20 minutes three to four times during 12 months. Intention-to-treat analysis was performed using linear mixed models with outcomes at 6 and 12 months and baseline adjustment.

RESULTS: The intervention showed moderate compliance and acceptable session duration. Intervention participants were satisfied with nurses’ care. Depressive symptoms, health-related quality of life, and worry of cancer were not significantly different in the two treatment groups. The intervention seemed feasible in clinical practice, but no effects on patient outcomes were seen.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Patients with head and neck cancer appreciated the opportunity to discuss their problems and challenges with a nurse. Nurses supported patients with basic psychosocial care, minor interventions, and referral possibilities.

KEYWORDS: Distress Thermometer; head and neck cancer; depressive symptoms; quality of life

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