Oncology Outpatient and Provider Responses to a Computerized Symptom Assessment System

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Key Points . . .

- During chemotherapy follow-up clinic appointments, oncology outpatients reported good usability, high satisfaction, and mixed impact with a computerized assessment system, targeting multiple symptoms, symptom management strategies, and symptom outcomes.
- Oncologists and oncology nurses (i.e., providers) reported modest usability for the computerized symptom assessment system and suggested several changes to improve the system.
- Despite patient reports indicating symptoms were well addressed, lack of symptom documentation in medical records suggest that the computerized system did not affect provider documentation.

Careful symptom assessment is vital for providing quality cancer care (Institute of Medicine, 2003). However, systematic assessment is complex. Patients with cancer may experience multiple symptoms at any one time (Patrick et al., 2004) but tend not to spontaneously share information about those symptoms (Stone et al., 2000; Ward et al., 1993). Healthcare providers also may find addressing multiple symptoms during a single patient encounter difficult or time-consuming. In addition, provider documentation can be incomplete or may not reflect patients' symptoms (DeVon, Ryan, & Zerwic, 2004; Stromgren, Groenvold, Pedersen, et al., 2001; Stromgren, Groenvold, Sorensen, & Andersen, 2001). Computerized symptom assessment systems have been proposed as a means of overcoming these barriers. Previous reports suggest that touch screen systems with printed reports are feasible, can be completed in a reasonable timeframe, and may increase discussions of symptoms initiated by providers. This article describes patient and provider responses to a computerized symptom assessment system that was pilot-tested in a university-based National Cancer Institute-designated outpatient cancer center.

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