

Journal Watch

Sensory and affective dimensions of advanced cancer pain.

Sela R, Bruera E, Conner-Spady B, Cumming C, Walker C. *Psycho-Oncology* 2002; 11:23-34.

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Abstract:

The present study was designed to explore the extent to which advanced cancer pain is explicable in terms of both physical pain intensity and affect. Most notably, it expanded on previous findings by more clearly elucidating the relationship between several discrete emotional states and the total experience of cancer pain. One hundred and eleven patients with cancer pain attending a Pain and Symptom Control Clinic were studied. Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) were used to quantify overall pain intensity and the accompanying affect. Then, correlations were calculated to evaluate the relationships both between and within these two variables. Overall, the participants rated both the pain intensity and the negative affect associated with that pain as high. Of the examined affective components of pain, frustration and exhaustion were found to be the most significant. In addition, some gender differences were identified in terms of frustration, anger, fear, exhaustion, helplessness, and hopelessness.

Comments:

Strengths/uniqueness:

This report underlines the importance of multi-dimensional pain assessments in cancer patients.

Weaknesses:

The results are from a study group of highly selected problematic cancer patients referred to a specialist pain and symptom control clinic. Correlation with a multi-dimensional classification system such as the Edmonton Staging System would have been useful to better understand underlying poor prognostic factors in this patient population.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

This study underlines the need for carefully designed future pain studies to clarify whether the issues of patient affect demonstrated here contribute significantly to the pain perception and expression of the uncontrolled pain results in the affective problems noted.