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Screening of distress in cancer patients: Its needs, importance and tool of examination

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Cancer continues to be a majorly significant threat to our society despite advancements in its diagnosis and treatment. It is the second largest cause for mortality around the world after cardiovascular diseases. Cancer patients have to cope with a great deal of distress. Individuals facing a possible diagnosis of cancer are confronted with multiple physical, psychological and educational challenges. A diagnosis of cancer increases susceptibility to stress; indeed, cancer patients are at high risk for a variety of emotional disorders including anxiety, traumatic stress and depression. Patients' stress can be amplified by long waiting room times, lack of information, poor communication between clinic staff and patients and inadequate psychosocial care. This calls for an immediate need to begin screening of distress in cancer patients. Examination of distress not only helps in capturing it's prevalence but also guides in identifying the common areas of distress among patients, as well as relevant solutions to their problems. Most importantly, screening of distress alone is not solely useful in itself. After screening, patients must be given adequate interventions and be followed up regularly to monitor changes in their levels of distress over time. There are several tools available for screening of distress in cancer patients. Some are traditional and most commonly used, as well as, recently, experts through research have come up with cancer-tailored tools for examination of distress. The long established tools include- DASS (42), DASS (21), ESAS, HADS, Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI) and many more. On the other hand, we now have tools more suited towards cancer patients' interests such as the National Comprehensive Cancer Network Distress Thermometer (NCCN-DT), Emotional Thermometer (ET), Mental Adjustment to Cancer (MAC) scale and so on. This study encompasses the silent features of each of these tools, methodology of use and application in daily routine.

Biography

Aalapti Singh is currently pursuing Doctoral Research in the area of Psycho-Oncology in India. Her work persistently focuses on de-stigmatization and awareness creation about cancer and its treatment. She is interested in the areas of distress screening and management among oncology staff to help reduce burnout.

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