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Demoralization and associated features in an Italian sample of end-of-life cancer patients

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Demoralization and associated features in an Italian sample of end-of-life cancer patients.

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End-of-Life Care

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Symptoms and Survivorship

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Abstract Disclosures

Abstract:

Background: Demoralization is an expression of cancer-related existential distress that emerges from feelings of loss and changes linked to a life-threatening clinical condition. It is characterized by subjective incompetence, sense of failure, hopelessness, loss of purpose/meaning and low self-esteem. The study aimed to explore prevalence, latent dimensions and associated features of demoralization in a sample of end-of-life cancer patients. **Methods:** Participants were recruited for a cross-sectional assessment. For each patient, demoralization, anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, pain, spiritual well-being, and dignity were evaluated through validated rating scales and personal and medical data were gathered by a clinician. Final sample consisted of 235 end-of-life cancer patients with a Karnofsky Performance Status (KPS) lower than 50 and a life expectancy of few weeks. **Results:** High levels of demoralization occurred in 22.6% (n = 53) of patients. Sixty-four participants (27.2%) had low demoralization and 50.2% (n = 118) had moderate demoralization. Emotional Distress and Inability to Cope, Loss of Purpose and Meaning, Worthlessness, Sense of Failure and Dysphoria were the five latent dimensions of demoralization emerged from the factor analysis. Demoralization was significantly associated with depression, anxiety, dignity, spiritual well-being and the physical symptoms except for nausea and breathing problems. **Conclusions:** Demoralization levels seem to be higher in this distinctive population than in advanced cancer patients. This could be due to the fact that end-of-life cancer patients are in a severe clinical condition and nearing death. The emerged demoralization dimensions could be five forms of expression of the existential distress typical of this illness phase. The considerable number of patients suffering from demoralization strengthen the need for psychological interventions in order to reduce the existential distress at the end of life, focusing on finding meaning and detecting spiritual concerns.

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