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Dimensions and predictors of multiple symptoms in patients with advanced cancer in Saudi Arabia

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Purpose: An evaluation was done to determine: The occurrence rates for and average frequency, severity, and distress ratings for 32 common symptoms, and predictors of total number of symptoms in patients with advanced cancer.

Introduction: Multiple symptoms are common in patients with advanced cancer. However, little is known about specific dimensions of the symptom experience.

Methods/Discussion: Patients with advanced cancer (N=100) completed the Memorial Symptom Assessment Scale. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictors of the total number of symptoms.

Findings/Results: Differences in the rankings of specific symptoms were found across the symptom dimensions. Seven symptoms (i.e., pain, sleep disturbance, problems with sexual interest or activity, lack of energy, constipation, numbness/tingling in arms or legs, changes in the way food tastes) were in the top ten symptoms across all dimensions except occurrence. Over 14% of the variance in total number of symptoms was explained by age, gender, race, performance status, and comorbidities. Comorbidity score uniquely explained 4.5% of the variance in total number of symptoms ($p=0.036$).

Conclusion: Multiple symptoms are highly prevalent in patients with advanced cancer. Differences exist in the rankings of symptoms across specific symptom dimensions. Pain, sleep disturbance, problems with sexual interest or activity, lack of energy, constipation, numbness/tingling in arms or legs, and changes in the way food tastes were found to be highly prevalent symptoms across the various dimensions. Worse comorbidity was significantly associated with higher total number of symptoms and when taken together with demographic and other clinical characteristics.

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