

1 Introduction

The title of the study is “*The Effect of Chemotherapy on Patients’ Nutritional Status and Distress Levels*”. The idea of such a project stemmed from my interest both in the field of Nursing and in that of Nutrition, being both a nurse and a nutritionist himself. Since I have graduated as a nurse from the University of Malta, I have also obtained a qualification in Nutrition which permits me to work as a nutritionist in Malta. During the past year, since the opening of a new general hospital in Malta, I have also worked closely with the unit where patients with haematological cancers are treated by chemotherapy, supporting the patients and training the staff on nutrition issues. I have seen the suffering that these patients go through and as I greatly believe in the benefits of a healthy diet, I thought it would be to investigate whether I could help these patients through nutrition. As well as providing a physical support to patients, it is surmised that nutrition might have some sort of relationship also with patients levels of distress, perhaps helping them to cope with challenges they meet. I therefore decided to see whether providing good nutritional counselling could alleviate their distress. Besides, after conducting a literature search, I found that literature on this topic was scarce. Hence, both in order to help these patients, who tended to be mostly young adults, and in order to fill in the gap in the literature, it seemed appropriate to conduct such a study on this population of patients, who seemed a particularly vulnerable client group.

The correlation methodology was chosen because I felt it was the most appropriate to investigate possible relationships between the variables which he wished to compare. The aim of this study is to see whether there is a relationship between actual patient nutritional status and patient distress, actual and patient-perceived nutritional status, and the levels of distress of patients as they underwent chemotherapy. I surmised that it was possible that a more robust nutritional status might be associated with lower levels of patient distress. Whilst my study could not prove a causative relationship, correlations were worth exploring if they contributed to a future investigation of the psychological insulation that nutrition might offer patients, helping them to reduce their level of distress. Hence this study aims to identify a possible relationship between nutritional status (actual and perceived) and chemotherapy-induced distress in patients treated for haematological cancers.