

The Effect of Chemotherapy on Patients' Nutritional Status and Distress Levels

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Background

This study involved a correlation study aimed to identify a possible relationship between nutritional status (actual and perceived) and chemotherapy-induced distress in patients treated for haematological cancers. It was surmised that nutrition provided physical support to patients and have some sort of relationship also with their levels of distress, perhaps helping them to cope with challenges they meet.

Methodology

The **study sample** consisted of seven men and six women. Their treatment regimes differed in small degree, but the side-effects of the treatment, those causing the distress to the patients, were similar.

The **study objectives** ranged from identifying a possible correlation mentioned above, comparing actual patients' nutritional status with their own perceived status, and also comparing their nutritional status across the treatment cycle. A subsidiary objective of the study was to invite patients to report whether they perceived their nutritional status as insulating them in some way against the side-effects of treatment.

The **tools** used were the Body Mass Index, Distress Thermometer Problem Score (N.N.C.N., 2008) and questionnaires.

Results

Data Collection Points	Correlation (r)	Significance (p-value)
Pre-treatment	-0.153	0.309
At 4 - 6 days after start of treatment	0.508	0.038
Post-treatment	0.528	0.032

Table 1: Correlation statistics comparing patient nutritional status and distress levels at the three data collection points.

Conclusions

There is a significant correlation between patients' nutritional status and their distress levels after the side-effects of the chemotherapy start manifesting themselves to the patients. Better nourished patients showed less side-effect induced distress. Other factors investigated (e.g. nutritional supplementation, steroid treatment, chemotherapy strength, perceived patient nutritional status) showed no correlations with these variables. More research is recommended on the subject area.