

Pre-Validation of the Transitoriness Tool to Assess Patients' Thoughts of Death

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Background

Receiving a diagnosis of cancer is experienced as an existential threat and a confrontation with the transitory nature of life. This experience, i.e., the experience of Transitoriness, includes becoming aware of death. Persons experience fear and anxiety. Subsequently, persons develop a wish for changes in life and to consider implementation of these changes^{1,2,3}. For the experience of Transitoriness, a psychometric instrument has been developed as only few appropriate instruments exist to date.

This instrument to assess the experience of Transitoriness in persons with a new cancer diagnosis includes three subscales, namely awareness of finitude of life, anxiety and change. Awareness indicates the extent to which persons with a new cancer diagnosis feel that their life is in danger. Thoughts of death are present. Anxiety helps to determine the extent to which persons with a new cancer diagnosis are anxious or fear the threat to life. Uncertainty, feelings of isolation, of being misunderstood and distress are present. Change, finally, indicates the extent to which persons with a new cancer diagnosis wish to introduce changes into their lives. Newness of events, a wish for normalcy and implementing changes such as living a less sedentary lifestyle are experienced^{1,2}.



Abbildung 1

Aim

The studies aimed at the development of the instrument Transitoriness; at validating its contents by conducting a Delphi study, and subsequently at applying the instrument to the target population.

Methods

A total of four studies were conducted in partial fulfillment of a Master of Science in Nursing program.

Study 1: mixed-methods approach including a Delphi study and cognitive interviewing⁴.

Studies 2-3: descriptive, transversal, and comparative design^{5,6}.

Study 4: secondary, exploratory, comparative data analysis approach⁷.

For studies 2-4 the new instrument was compared to the Gold standard: Awareness – SEKT and DADDS (Study 4)⁷, anxiety – STAI-S (Study 3)⁶, change – PTGI (Study 2)⁵. SEKT: to determine proximity of death, 6 items (various Likert-type responses), Cronbach α : 0.69 et 0.81. DADDS: to determine distress about death, 15 items (Likert-type responses 0 to 4), Cronbach α : 0.95. STAI-S: 20 items (Likert-type responses 1 to 4), Cronbach α : 0.86 à 0.94.

PTGI: to determine change as a consequence of a traumatic event. 21 items (Likert-type responses 0 to 5), Cronbach α 0.90.

Ethical approval was granted for all studies by the Cantonal Ethics Committee of the Canton of Vaud.

Results

Study 1: Delphi consultation (three rounds) of 12 experts (with professional backgrounds in nursing science, medicine, theology, psychology and clinical nursing practice). I-CVI: 0,72 -1,00 for the whole instrument⁴. The final instrument consisted of 46 items comprising three subscales: Awareness (12 items, 0-60 points), Anxiety (12 items, 0-60 points), and Change (22 items). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (4 absolutely agree to 0 not at all agree)⁴.

Transitoriness Instrument ^{5,6,7}			
Subscales	Awareness (n=27)	Anxiety (n=30)	Change (n=28)
Minimum	8	15	17
Maximum	26	30	47
Mean	17.26	22.64	34.37

Correlations with Gold Standards ^{5,6,7}		
Transitoriness - Awareness	SEKT/ DADDS	$\rho = -0,21$, p-Wert = 0,27/ $\rho = -0,18$, p-Wert = 0,36
Transitoriness - Anxiety	STAI	$\rho = -0,02$; p = 0,9
Transitoriness - Change	PTGI	$\rho = 0,39$; p=0,033

Voices of Patients⁴

... the instrument corresponds with my experience of the illness...

... some items get to me more as they push me to think...

“... [as a result of] my participation in this study, I have been able to discuss issues concerning death with my son for the first time.”

“...this has already happened to me... I have attended to my brother who had cancer, at that time I have already been confronted with life's finitude.”

“...I am moved emotionally as the instrument touches upon issues and questions that relate to my current experience of my illness...”

Conclusion

The instrument Transitoriness will help to identify existential concerns in patients who have a recent cancer diagnosis. Thus, it will be possible to determine areas for specific support in patients. Subsequently, health professionals can develop and propose tailored interventions to patients who have a new cancer diagnosis. Hence, validation and further development of the instrument Transitoriness is desirable to improve actual care of patients newly diagnosed with cancer³.



Abbildung 2

Literaturangaben:

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