Depression in Advanced Cancer

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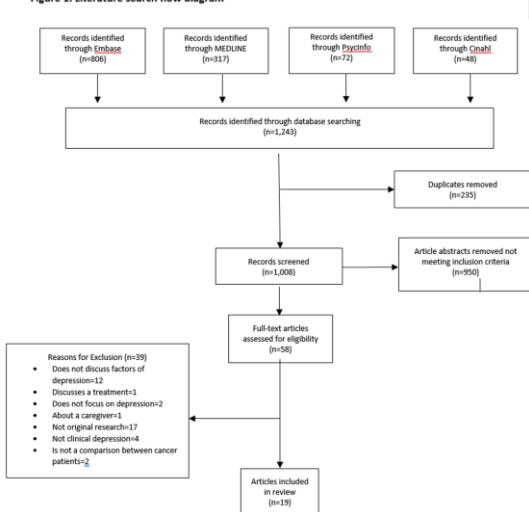
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Introduction

Palliative care cancer patients often experience symptoms beyond those directly related to their illness. One of the most prevalent symptom is depression, with 24.6% of all advanced cancer patients experiencing depressive symptoms (2), which is significantly higher than in the general population (3). Depression has been shown to impact poorly on the survival prognosis in these patients (4). The goal of this scoping review was to identify factors and correlates of depression in advanced cancer patients and compare the prevalence of depression in different care settings in an effort to identify areas of research that can lead to more efficacious management strategies.

Materials and Methods

A scoping review was conducted to discover factors and correlates of depression in advanced cancer patients, compare the prevalence of depression in these patients in different care settings, and identify areas that would benefit from further research. A comprehensive search was conducted using four databases (MEDLINE, Embase, PsychInfo, and Cinahl). Articles were considered eligible if they discussed factors that may correlate to depression in adults with advanced cancer, or discussed differences in depression rates between cancer patients in palliative care versus other settings. Depressive symptoms were defined through patients taking self-report scales such as the GDI, BDI, and HADS. Two reviewers screened identified hits, and extracted data from good articles.

Figure 1. Literature search flow diagram

Results

The initial literature search resulted in 1,243 articles,1008 after removing duplicates. Fifty-eight potentially eligible articles were considered at the full text screening level. Nineteen articles were deemed eligible for the qualitative synthesis, and were included in the final study (see Figure 1). From these nineteen articles, a number of observations were made:

- 5/9 articles discussing differences in depression between different cancer types found no difference, and there was no consensus in the other 4.
- 10 studies reported on demographic differences in depression, 5 of which found none.
  - 2 determined that younger patients were less likely to be depressed while 2 found the opposite.
  - 2 found that women were more depression-prone but 1 found that men were.
  - 1 found that married and/or Hispanic patients were less likely to experience depressive symptoms.
- 3 studies concluded that patients in good spiritual health are less at risk for depression
- 2 studies showed strong correlations between metastases and depression
- Cognitive impairment, less control over the course of illness, and sleep disorders/fatigue were also correlated with depression
- Little consensus was found in comparing the merits of palliative care versus other settings in regards to depression these patients.

Conclusions

Based on this review, poor spiritual health, metastases, cognitive impairment, less control over the course of the illness, fatigue, sleep disorders, and being female are positively correlated with having depression. It would be interesting to see future research conducted on how the physical and emotional stresses of cancer affects the rates/severity of depression, especially since the factors leading to depression in palliative cancer patients and the general population are generally the same. Further research should conduct in-depth analysis of these factors individually, which may be help facilities develop strategies to improve the quality of life for advanced cancer patients.

References

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