

The Role of Returning to Work in Distress Management, Symptom Severity, and Self-Efficacy in Patients with Oral Cancer



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Introduction

- Patients with **oral cancer** suffer from a variety of distress, which can influence their confidence in returning to work. However, the role of returning to work in characteristics of **distress management**, **symptom severity**, and **self-efficacy** remain unclear.
- Aim:** To compare these characteristics between patients who returned to work (RTW group) and those who did not (Non-RTW group)

Method

- Design/Sample:** A cross-sectional study was conducted at a medical center in Northern Taiwan to recruit outpatients with oral cancer.
- Questionnaires:** Demographic and clinical characteristics form, National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), Distress Thermometer (DT), Symptom Severity Scale (SSS), Cancer Behavior Inventory (CBI)
- Statistics :**Chi-square test, Mann-Whitney U test

Results

- A total of **37 patients** were recruited.
- Compared to the RTW group, **the Non-RTW group (Table 1)** had:
 - Higher educational levels
 - A higher proportion of married individuals
 - A higher proportion of individuals who did not drink or had quit drinking
 - Lower overall self-efficacy and lower confidence in maintaining and returning to work
- Common concerns identified in the DT (**Table 2**):
 - Both groups shared concerns about **changes in eating and appearance**.
 - RTW group:
 - Greater concerns about worry or anxiety, relationships with children and family members, finances, and spiritual/religious relationships.
 - Non-RTW group:
 - Greater concerns about relationships with friends or coworkers, self-care, and work-related issues.

Conclusion

- Our study provides references for targeted care needs for health providers, applicable to both patients who have returned to work and those who have not. Providing individualized care for those who have not returned to work and linking resources to help them return to work can effectively enhance their quality of life during survivorship.

Table1. Sample characteristics in two groups (N=37)

Characteristics	RTW (n=14)		Non-RTW (n=23)		z	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Age(year)	55.36	8.50	59.61	8.49	122.50	0.23
Educational years	11.92	2.75	9.48	2.59	198.00	0.04
Diagnosis time(month)	55.92	77.35	81.23	70.46	69.50	0.32
Functional status (KPS) ^a	89.23	2.77	85.79	12.16	134.50	0.68
BMI	23.88	3.68	25.07	4.14	124.00	0.34

Characteristics	RTW (n=14)		Non-RTW (n=23)		p
	n	%	n	%	
Occupational status					0.52
Unemployed	0	0	2	8.7	
Part-time/full-time work	14	100.0	21	91.3	
Marital status					0.02
Single/divorced/widowed	7	50.0	3	13.0	
Married	7	50.0	20	87.0	
Chronic disease					0.09
Yes	8	57.1	6	26.1	
No	6	42.9	17	73.9	
Smoking					1.00
No/Quit	4	28.6	8	34.8	
Yes	10	71.4	15	65.2	
Drinking					0.04
No/Quit	8	57.1	21	91.3	
Yes	6	42.9	2	8.7	
Betel nut					0.45
No/Quit	4	28.6	4	17.4	
Yes	10	71.4	19	82.6	
Cancer stage					0.41
I	1	7.1	2	8.7	
II	1	7.1	4	17.4	
III	4	28.6	2	8.7	
IV	8	57.1	15	65.2	

Table 2. Comparing Characteristics of Distress Management, Symptom Severity and Self-efficacy between the two groups (N=37)

	RTW (n=14)		Non-RTW (n=23)		z	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Distress Management (DT)^a						
Severity of distress	3.21	2.49	4.57	3.17	120.00	0.21
Physical concerns (counts)	2.29	2.30	1.83	1.50	167.50	0.84
Emotional concerns (counts)	1.21	1.97	1.48	11.86	142.00	0.57
Social concerns (counts)	0.07	0.27	0.48	0.79	121.50	0.22
Practical concerns (counts)	0.50	1.02	1.22	1.28	107.50	0.09
Spiritual or religious concerns	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.49	140.00	0.53
Cancer Behavior Inventory (CBI)^c						
Overall CBI	151.64	26.97	130.78	32.43	240.00	0.01
Maintaining Independence and Positive Attitude	26.79	3.96	23.61	5.90	215.50	0.09
Participating in Medical Care	36.07	6.03	33.09	7.49	198.00	0.26
Coping and Stress Management	44.57	8.70	39.78	11.02	206.50	0.16
Managing Affect	25.57	6.02	23.04	6.81	198.00	0.26
Maintaining and Returning to Work	18.64	3.54	11.26	5.93	280.00	<0.01
Symptom Severity Scale (SSS)^b	25.64	20.74	32.78	21.39	129.50	0.33

Note: ^a Distress Management was assessed by using the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Distress Thermometer (DT) questionnaire, with the higher scores indicating a higher level of distress. ^b Symptom severity was measured by using Symptom Severity Scale (SSS), with the higher scores indicating the higher level of severity. ^c Self-efficacy was assessed by using the Cancer Behavior Inventory (CBI), with the higher scores indicating better CBI status.

Distress Management (DT) -Top one selected item ^a

	RTW	Non-RTW
Physical concerns	Changes in eating	Changes in eating
Emotional concerns	Worry or anxiety, Changes in appearance	Changes in appearance
Social concerns	Relationship with children, Relationship with family members	Relationship with friends or coworkers
Practical concerns	Finances	Taking care of myself, Work
Spiritual or religious concerns	Relationship with the sacred	-

Note: ^a The most selected items by participants in each category of concerns.

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