

Narrative medicine in the cancer care: implementation and impact

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Issue:

National and international health authorities have described Narrative-based medicine (NBM) in clinical practice as a fundamental tool for acquiring, understanding and integrating the different points of view of those involved in the disease and its treatment, promoting more effective and appropriate care.

Description of the problem:

The use of NBM is part of the strategic project to improve patient-engagement in San Raffaele Hospital in Milan. Its implementation started, using the 'DNM-Digital Narrative Medicine' web-based platform, with the pilot prostate cancer path in March 2019.

Results:

A 10-item questionnaire was sent to all 47 patients and 45 doctors involved, to evaluate: benefits perceived by the care team in terms of communication support, personalization of therapy, observation of cognitive elements not otherwise evident; benefits perceived by the patient (support, communication, self-management, identification of emotional, relational, social elements of daily life); patient and medical staff opinions in terms of compliance, accessibility, ease of use. The overall rating was 4.3/5 for doctors and 4.2/5 for patients. Patients valued the most the platform supporting them in the decision on what treatment to undergo (4.8/5), for the doctor the platform has been important in considering unknown aspects of the patient and understanding the patient's point of view (4.4/5). Patients, more than doctors, perceived platform usability positively. 43% of the patients who decided not to participate reported to prefer a direct approach with the doctor.

Lessons:

The oncologic field represents an optimal setting for the implementation of methods aimed at strengthening communication and relationship of care. NBM offers the possibility of exploring elements as adherence to treatment, perception of illness, socio-psychological impact, sometimes missed during the visit, enhancing the conversation between patient and care team and stimulating the co-construction of care.

Key messages:

- NBM has proven to be a useful tool and a good communication channel in the oncologic setting.
- The NBM platform demonstrated good acceptability and ease of use by doctors and patients.