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Screening for distress: benefits and challenges

Luigi Grassi

*Institute of Psychiatry, Department of Biomedical and Specialty Surgical Sciences, University of
Ferrara, Ferrara, Italy*
Luigi.grassi@unife.it

Aims: To analyze the information for the role of screening for distress in oncology in terms of benefits and problems not yet solved.

Methods: Analysis of the most recent literature concerning the policy of screening for distress in different parts of the world and the advantages to implement

Results: A series of data exist in several countries on the validation and application of psychological tools for screening for distress, including the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines and recommendations for screening from other international agencies (e.g. Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology, . The experience in European countries is also extremely promising. Some problems result not to be solved, such as education of health care professionals, development of algorithms defining the steps involved in screening and assessment, implementation of psychosocial oncology services available. Data on the role of screening as a facilitator of communication are also missing.

Conclusions: Screening for distress has become a major and mandatory step for optimal clinical care of cancer patients throughout the world. However, a series of problems need to be addressed to implement the policy in cancer care settings and to show its efficacy in terms of facilitation of communication, eliciting problems and concerns, identifying patients at risk for or showing psychological/psychiatric disorders.

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Mirella Ruggeri

Section of Psychiatry, University of Verona
and Verona Hospital Trust

ORGANIZING SECRETARIAT

COGEST M. & C. srl

Vicolo San Silvestro 6, 37122 Verona (Italy)

Ph: +39 045 597940 · Fax: +39 045 597265

Email: cogest@cogest.info · www.cogest.info