Group Psychotherapy of Dysfunctional Fear of Progression in Patients with Chronic Arthritis or Cancer

Abstract:
Background: This study investigated the effectiveness of brief psychotherapeutic group interventions in reducing dysfunctional fear of disease progression (FoP). The interventions comprised either cognitive-behavioral group therapy or supportive-experiential group therapy. We tested whether these generic interventions would prove effective in different illness types. Methods: Chronic arthritis in-patients (n = 174) and cancer in-patients (n = 174), respectively, were randomized to receive one of the two interventions. The patients provided data before intervention, at discharge, and at 3 and 12 months of follow-up. FoP was the primary outcome, secondary outcomes were anxiety, depression and quality of life. A treatment-as-usual control group provided data on the primary outcome. Results: Patients with chronic arthritis indicated higher levels of FoP than cancer patients. The results revealed that, compared with no specialized intervention, both group therapies were effective in reducing dysfunctional FoP, but only among cancer patients. The effect sizes were 0.54 (cognitive-behavioral therapy) and 0.50 (supportive experiential therapy). The interventions were not differently effective in reducing the secondary outcomes. Conclusions: Dysfunctional FoP can be effectively targeted with brief group
interventions. Psychotherapeutic interventions for reducing FoP should focus on specific illness characteristics.

**Stichworte:**
Cancer; Chronic disease; Fear of progression; Group psychotherapy; Randomized controlled trial; Rheumatoid arthritis

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