Evaluation of two group therapies to reduce fear of progression in cancer patients.

PURPOSE: This paper aims to evaluate the effects of two psychotherapeutic interventions on dysfunctional fear of progression (FoP) in cancer patients and to investigate illness-specific influences.

METHODS: One hundred seventy-four cancer patients were recruited from two rehabilitation clinics and randomly assigned to either a four-session cognitive-behavioral group therapy or a supportive-experiential group therapy. The main outcome criterion was FoP that was assessed with the Fear of Progression Questionnaire (FoP-Q) directly before (T1) and after (T2) the intervention, as well as 3 (T3) and 12 months (T4) after discharge. Secondary outcomes were anxiety, depression, and quality of life that were assessed with the following questionnaires: Questions on Life Satisfaction, Questionnaire for General Health Status, and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale. Patients from the control group (n = 91) who received treatment as usual were recruited 1 year later with the same inclusion criteria and assessed with the FoP-Q at T1, T2, and T4.

RESULTS: Analyses showed a significant main effect for time and a significant interaction for group x time for the main outcome variable. FoP decreased significantly over time in both intervention groups in contrast to the control group that showed only short-term improvements. The interventions were also effective in
improving secondary outcomes except general life satisfaction. Analyses of cancer specific influences on FoP indicated a significant influence of disease status, i.e., patients with metastases and recurrence of cancer gained most from the interventions. CONCLUSIONS: Fear of progression, one of the main sources of distress for cancer patients, can be reduced with short psychotherapeutic interventions.