Experiences with a specific screening instrument to identify psychosocial support needs in breast cancer patients.

OBJECTIVE: In order to determine the need for professional psychosocial support in breast cancer patients, we used the physician-administered Basic Documentation for Psycho-Oncology (PO-Bado), which is an expert rating scale containing 12 items belonging to somatic and psychological problems. Furthermore, we investigated sociodemographic and medical predictors of somatic and psychological distress and need for psychosocial support. STUDY DESIGN: From 2/2005 to 09/2007, n=333 consecutive patients with breast cancer were included in the study. The majority of the patients suffered from early-stage breast cancer. The mean age of the participants was 59.9 years (SD=12.6, range 24-92). Two physicians rated patients' psychosocial distress and evaluated their need for psychosocial support according to the PO-Bado guidelines. RESULTS: Exhaustion/tiredness was the item rated highest in the physical distress dimension. In the psychological distress dimension, the items anxiety/worries/tension and grief/despondency/depression obtained the highest mean. Younger age and a history of psychiatric/psychotherapeutic treatment in the past were associated with higher current distress. Women who planned to undergo mastectomy were rated as showing more somatic distress than women for whom breast...
conserving therapy was planned, but the two groups did not differ with regard to psychological
distress. Objective cancer-related variables (tumour size and grading) were not associated with
distress. Need for professional psychosocial support was seen in 23% of the patients. Previous
psychiatric/psychotherapeutic treatment was the only variable associated with current need for
psychosocial support. Forty-six percent of the patients with need for psychosocial support accepted
the counselling offered. CONCLUSIONS: The structured assessment of breast cancer patients'
psychosocial distress with the interviewer-administered PO-Bado assists the physician to arrive at a
detailed expert evaluation. This might help to improve the psychosocial care of breast cancer patients.

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