Routine psychosocial distress screening in radiotherapy: implementation and evaluation of a computerised procedure.

To implement distress screening in routine radiotherapy practice and to compare computerised and paper-and-pencil screening in terms of acceptability and utility. We used the Stress Index RadioOncology (SIRO) for screening. In phase 1, 177 patients answered both a computerised and a paper version, and in phase 2, 273 patients filled out either the computerised or the paper assessment. Physicians received immediate feedback of the psycho-oncological results. Patients, nurses/radiographers (n=27) and physicians (n=15) evaluated the screening procedure. The agreement between the computerised and the paper assessment was high (intra-class correlation=0.92). Patients' satisfaction did not differ between the two administration modes. Nurses/radiographers rated the computerised assessment less time consuming (3.7 vs 18.5%), although the objective data did not reveal a difference in time demand. Physicians valued the psycho-oncological results as interesting and informative (46.7%). Patients and staff agreed that the distress screening did not lead to an increase in the discussion of psychosocial issues in clinician-patient encounters. The implementation of a distress screening was feasible and highly accepted, regardless of the administration mode. Communication trainings should be offered in order to
increase the discussion of psychosocial topics in clinician-patient encounters.