Radiotherapy: Impact of Quality of Life and Need for Psychological Care: Results of a Longitudinal Study

Background: In the framework of a prospective longitudinal study, the quality of life (QoL) and support requirements of patients from a university hospital department of radiotherapy were evaluated for the first time by means of established psychodiagnostic questionnaires.

Patients and Methods: At first, 732 patients were screened, of whom 446 (60.9%) fulfilled the criteria for inclusion; 39.1% did not (refusals 21.0%, low Karnofsky performance status 6.6%, management problems 3.4%, language barriers 3.0%, cognitive restrictions 2.6%, death 2.5%). Disease-specific aspects of QoL (Functional Assessment of Cancer Treatment – General, FACT-G) and moderating variables (Social Support Scale (SSS), Disease Coping (FKV), Self-Assessment Depression Scale (SDS), and Self-Defined Care Requirements (BB)) were self-rated by patients with different tumor types before radiotherapy (T1), after radiotherapy (T2), and 6 weeks after the end of radiotherapy (T3). We studied 265 patients (157 male, 108 female; median age 58.6 years) with complete data of three time points.

Results: In general, QoL of patients decreased significantly over all time points in all subscales. Social support was rated high and remained constant throughout the treatment. Apparent coping mechanisms were active problem-oriented coping, leisure activities, and self-support.
The patients’ depression proved to be an important and constant factor without significant changes. The support requirement is characterized by the need for more medical information and dialogue with a physician. Conclusions: Early specific support from personnel with radiotherapeutic skills, during the disease-coping process as well as during rehabilitation, should be a permanent component of an integrated radiooncological treatment schedule.