

■ Article

Information Needs of Patients With Melanoma: A Nursing Challenge

Silvia Passalacqua, PsyD, Zorika Christiana di Rocco, MD, Cristina Di Pietro, DStat, Aurelia Mozzetta, PsyD, Stefano Tabolli, MD, MPH, Alessandro Scoppola, MD, PhD, Paolo Marchetti, MD, PhD, and Damiano Abeni, MD, MPH



Courtesy of the National Cancer Institute/Larry Meyer.

Evidence continues to suggest that patients with cancer require more information about their disease and its consequences. To evaluate the information needs of patients with advanced melanoma compared to patients with other malignancies, a cross-sectional study was conducted on 221 unselected patients from the oncology department of a dermatologic hospital in Italy. Patients completed the Edmonton Symptom Assessment System and the Need Evaluation Questionnaire, two standardized tools for symptoms and psychosocial needs assessment. Results highlight that patients with advanced melanoma have, in general, a higher need for information compared to patients with other cancers, even if they report fewer symptoms. Future studies on the needs of patients with melanoma may contribute to tailored and more satisfactory patient-centered care. Recommendations for clinical practice include that particular attention should be paid by the oncology team to the need for a strong therapeutic relationship.

Silvia Passalacqua, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist in the Health Services Research Unit at Istituto Dermatologico dell'Immacolata, Istituto di Ricovero e Cura a Carattere Scientifico (IDI-IRCCS), Zorika Christiana di Rocco, MD, is a clinical oncologist in the Department of Oncology at IDI-IRCCS, Cristina Di Pietro, DStat, is a statistician in the Health Services Research Unit at IDI-IRCCS, Aurelia Mozzetta, PsyD, is the head of the Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychosomatic Psychotherapy at IDI-IRCCS, Stefano Tabolli, MD, MPH, is the director of the Health Services Research Unit at IDI-IRCCS, Alessandro Scoppola, MD, PhD, is the head of the Oncology Department at IDI-IRCCS, Paolo Marchetti, MD, PhD, is the head of the Oncology Department at Sant'Andrea Hospital and a professor of medical oncology at La Sapienza University of Rome, and Damiano Abeni, MD, MPH, is a senior epidemiologist in the Health Services Research Unit at IDI-IRCCS, all in Rome, Italy. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the authors, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. Passalacqua can be reached at silvia.passalacqua@libero.it, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org. (First submission November 2011. Revision submitted February 2012. Accepted for publication March 4, 2012.)

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Evidence increasingly suggests that patients with cancer require more information than they receive about their disease and its consequences. To receive a diagnosis of cancer is an extremely stressful life experience. Communication in cancer treatment involves the patient, family, and members of the cancer treatment team. Receiving comprehensible and extensive information not only helps patients with cancer understand their disease but also facilitates patients' decision making and coping (Ankem, 2005). The benefits of providing information to patients with cancer include increased disease control, improved coping, reduced anxiety, creation of realistic expectations, promoted self-care and participation, improved therapy compliance, and feelings of safety and security (Davies, Kinman, Thomas, & Bailey, 2008; McInnes et al., 2008; Piredda et al., 2008).

An important ethical debate exists on what and how much information should be revealed to the patient regarding the diagnosis (Kallergis, 2008). The issue seems to be particularly unexplored in literature for patients with melanoma; even the impact of melanoma on quality of life was investigated in only

a few studies. Jenkins, Fallowfield, and Saul (2001) reported that most patients wanted as much information as possible, both positive and negative, and 98% wanted to know if their illness was cancer. Similar results also were reported in a cross-sectional survey in Scotland (Meredith et al., 1996) and in a multicenter study in the United Kingdom (Cox, Jenkins, Catt, Langridge, & Fallowfield, 2006).

The prevalence of information needs reported in a meta-analysis by Harrison, Young, Price, Butow, and Soloman (2009) varied from 6%–93%, depending on the methods used and the mix of cancers, disease stages, and cultural scenarios. Therefore, it seems necessary to focus at least on specific cancers and specific disease stages, using validated questionnaires to provide meaningful estimates and allow meaningful comparisons between studies.

For melanoma, very little is known about the amount and kind of information patients want to receive, as well as how they perceive prognostic information. Patients seem to be unafraid to ask sensitive questions (Constantinidou et al., 2009) even if, similar to results from studies of other cancers