

R16 Image and self-esteem: a photo-therapy program to improve body image, increase self-awareness and the expression of emotions in breast cancer patients. A pilot study

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Background: Conventional breast cancer therapies often provoke consistent changes in patients' image than can negatively impact their self-perception and social relationships. Photo-therapy consists in the use of personal snapshots, magazine pictures and photos taken by others, under an expert therapist guide to reduce painful psychologic symptoms, facilitate the process of change, improve body image, self-consciousness and encourage the manifestation of emotions, better than words alone.

Methods: In **Photo-language** each patient chooses one of a set of images that represents her, to introduce herself to the group and to increase emotional awareness; **Photo-colage** consists in cutting and pasting images on a individual poster to explore cancer-related experiences and to recognize changes; in **Photo-dialogue** patients select a photo, on a set, that represents how they perceive their body in order to create an individual story; **Self-portrait** consists in comparing pictures of the patients taken by themselves with those taken by other people, to understand how they perceive themselves and how they are seen by others. Basic Self Esteem scale (SE), Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), FACIT Fatigue scale, NRS pain score, Distress Thermometer (DT), and two anxiety/depression tests (HADS and STAI-Y) were administrated at the beginning and end of the course.

Results: From 12/2016 to 03/2017 6 breast cancer patients, median age 54 (47-72), attended 16 weekly sessions of Photo-therapy, 5 of them in adjuvant hormonal therapy after surgery and chemotherapy, 1 in chemotherapy for advanced disease. Before Photo-therapy, Basic Self-Esteem was >75 percentiles in 1/6 cases; after the course 3/5 pts, who returned final test, scored >75 percentiles. Median PANAS-positive score showed an increase (from 23.7 to 27.3 points) and PANAS-negative a decrease (from 18.5 to 16.8). Fatigue, pain, anxiety, depression and distress evaluations did not show any change.

Conclusions: This pilot study of an image-based therapy suggests possible advantages of this technique in breast cancer patients to improve self-esteem and emotions. Larger studies are recommended.