Baseline characteristics of cancer Patients demanding integrative oncology (IO) support. The experience of Nuova Oncologia Integrata (NOI), an Italian non-profit organization


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Background: A part of cancer patients (pts) ask for IO. We assess their basal traits to justify their need to integrate conventional cancer therapy.

Methods: Nuova Oncologia Integrata (NOI) allows pts to choose mind-body support without having to depend upon economic factors. At entry, each pt receives 8 validated tests addressing basic self-esteem (BSE), anxiety/depression (HADS, STAI-Y), distress (DT), pain, fatigue (FACIT), pos/neg emotions (PANAS) and a self-reported measure of health (SF-36).

Results: From 10/2016 to 4/2017, 79 pts asked for mind-body programs. Males(M): 879 (10.1%); females(F) 71 (89.9%). Median age: M: 68 (42-82), F: 59 (32-80). 43.7% of F were 50-59 years old; 50% of M 70-79 years old. 60 pts (76%) completed tests. 15 pts (19%) returned incomplete tests. Primary tumor: Breast (81%), thyroid (2%), prostate (1), lung (1), lymphoma (2), brain (1), gastrointestinal (5) and gynecological (3). HADS: Anx/no-anxiety 41 pts (56.9%), slight 15 (20.8%), moderate 14 (19.4%), severe 2 (2.8%). Anxiety any grade: F: 45.5%, M: 16.7%; moderate/severe anxiety: F: 22.7%, M: 16.7%. State-trait anxiety (STAI): Clinically relevant: 54.7% pts T State: pos; 50%, neg; 5%, pos/T neg; 45%; T neg; 37%. Per age: cut-off age 65; 73.9% ST pos pts (<65) vs 10.7%, >65 HADS-D: no-depression 52 pts (72.2%), slight 13 (18.1%), moderate 6 (8.3%), severe 1 (1.4%). Depression any grade: 27.8%, moderate/severe: 9.7%. No differences by sex. Pain: absent 15.8%; slight 19.7%; moderate 43.4%; considerable 19.7%; severe 1.3%. DT: no-distress 9.3%; slight 21.3%; moderate 40%; severe 29.3%. FACIT: no-fatigue 4.1%, slight 59.7%, moderate 30.5%, considerable 5.5%, severe 0%. PANAS: pos/neg-emotions F vs M (median pos-score 26 vs 27); neg-emotions F vs M (median neg-score 20 vs 11.5). BSE: 15 pts (18.9%) scoring >75 percentile. Low score mostly seen in age 40-60. SF36: 22.8% feels worse than general population, namely physical role (39.2%), emotional role (30.4%), social activities (27.9%). In >80%, physical/mental activity, pain, vitality, is in the normal range.

Conclusions: Cancer pts in IO programs are comparable to the general population of same sex/age in vitality and physical/mental activity, but perception of physical/emotional role and social activities are worse. Anxiety is more prevalent than depression, particularly in younger/females. Women have neg emotions twice as much as men. Moderate pain is common. Fatigue is generally light; distress is common. A low Self-Esteem is seen in pts 50-60 year old. Knowing the basal traits of cancer pts seeking support can guide IO organizations.