

Perceptions of the medical consultation and capacities to make treatment decisions in patients with advanced cancer – The Onco:cide Project

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Objectives

Providing information about diagnosis and treatment options to patients with advanced cancer is particularly challenging due to the emotionally stressful situation and the complexity of the information. The aim of this project is to optimize the existing informed consent process on the basis of previous evidence and feedback from patients and physicians taking into account vulnerable patients in terms of decision-making capacity.

Methods

We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with 10 patients and 2 physicians in Germany with focus on the process of medical consultation, reported barriers, and suggestions for improvement. Patients were eligible if they were ≥ 18 years and newly diagnosed with advanced lung, esophageal or liver cancer. Narratives were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according using qualitative content analysis. Patients' competence to make treatment decisions was evaluated in another sample of patients (N=26) with the MacCAT-T.

Results

We found that the majority of patients felt that they had received good and comprehensive information about their diagnosis. However, it was also expressed that not everything was understood in the doctor's consultation. Shared decision-making for a specific therapy was rarely performed. Patients gave the following suggestions for improvement: easier language, more details about the course of treatment, and psychological support. Patients' decisional capacity according to MacCAT-T was lowest in the areas of understanding information and reasoning.

Conclusions

Although patients feel well informed, there are still deficits in their understanding of medical information and treatment options.

Keywords: advanced cancer, treatment decisions, capacities to consent, pre-treatment consultation