

Symptom Clusters in Thais with Advanced Cancer

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Abstract: Patients with advanced cancer often suffer from multiple concurrent symptoms. Symptom cluster identification may lead to effective symptom management, which can result in improved patient care. The purpose of this study was to explore the cluster of symptoms in Thais with advanced cancer. Two hundred and forty Thai patients with advanced cancer from three tertiary hospitals in Bangkok and the surrounding suburbs were recruited to complete a demographic questionnaire and Memorial Symptom Assessment Scale. Data were collected from November 2008 to April 2009.

The most common cancer reported was gastro-intestinal cancer, followed by breast cancer, hepato-biliary cancer and lung cancer. Pain was the most common symptom, followed by feeling bloated, lack of energy, shortness of breath and "I don't look like myself." Using principal component analysis, with varimax rotation, four symptom clusters were identified: "pain, sickness-behavior and psychological;" "anorexia-cachexia;" "gastro-intestinal and elimination;" and, "cutaneous and other."

The findings should help healthcare providers better understand the concomitant symptoms patients with cancer experience. This knowledge may lead to successful symptom management, reduced medication use and enhanced quality of life for patients with advanced cancer.

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Introduction

Patients with advanced cancer often suffer from multiple coexisting symptoms that are influenced by disease progression and treatment which may begin prior to diagnosis, continue throughout the course of the illness and adversely affect a patient's functional status and quality of life.^{1,2} The paradigm to study the symptom experience has shifted from a single symptom to multiple

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