

Symptom Management

The effects of self-affirmation on chemotherapy-related symptoms

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BACKGROUND: Positive effects of auditory stimulations are common in symptom management. However, the effect of self-affirmations on symptom management is not well known.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of self-affirmations and nature sounds on chemotherapy-related symptoms.

METHODS: This randomized, controlled experimental study was conducted with 140 patients receiving chemotherapy. The first experimental group listened to affirmations, the second listened to nature sounds, and the third listened to both.

FINDINGS: In the affirmation group, pain, tiredness, drowsiness, lack of appetite, depression, anxiety, and lack of well-being scores were lower. In the affirmation and nature sounds group, drowsiness, depression, anxiety, and lack of well-being scores were reduced. In the nature sounds group, tiredness, drowsiness, and lack of well-being scores were reduced. In the control group, tiredness, drowsiness, nausea, and lack of well-being scores were higher.

KEYWORDS

self-affirmations; nature sounds; symptom management; chemotherapy; nursing care

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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THE SELF CONSISTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S ATTRIBUTES, actions, values, roles, beliefs, goals, and social identities (Harris & Epton, 2010; Sherman & Hartson, 2011; Silverman, Logel, & Cohen, 2013). These components constitute the self-system, and the primary goal of this system is to protect and maintain a healthy self-integrity (Sherman & Hartson, 2011). In the presence of a threat to any component of the self-system, such as being fired from a job or being diagnosed with cancer, the self-integrity incurs the risk of disruption. Disruption of self-integrity is harmful for an individual's psychosocial well-being and may cause defensive behaviors, such as underestimating the problem. In a short time, defensive adaptations are protective; however, they do not eliminate the problem itself. Affirming different components of the self-system, such as being valuable, having goals, and having a strong social identity, may help restore self-integrity and give strength to the individual dealing with the threat (Silverman et al., 2013).

Self-affirming is a process that helps individuals be motivated and protect their perceived self-integrity (Harris & Epton, 2010; Sherman & Hartson, 2011; Silverman et al., 2013). It can be considered as a part of the psychological immune system, which initiates protective adaptations to protect the self from threats (Sherman & Hartson, 2011). The responses given by people to threatening situations differ in various ways. For instance, explaining the health risks of smoking is a threat to the self-integrity of a smoker. Therefore, the person can resist the potential harm by denigrating the explanation or trying to quit smoking (Harris & Epton, 2009). On the other hand, human beings tend to resist the messages that warn them about possible health risks because these warning messages are perceived as a threat to their self-integrity. By using self-affirmations, people can be motivated to maintain their global sense of self-integrity (Harris & Epton, 2010). For instance, a smoker may remind himself of his strength as a father or his success in business and his social life. When an individual affirms his or her other valued self-concepts, being a smoker seems less threatening (Harris & Epton, 2009).

In self-affirmation exercises, individuals repeat or write positive and meaningful values that encourage their self-integrity (Silverman et al., 2013). Studies that investigate the effects of self-affirmations on health behavior change are promising. Harris, Mayle, Mabbott, and Napper (2007) reported that self-affirmation promoted less defensive responding to the graphic