Distress and Psychosocial Needs
Demographic predictors of clinical distress after a diagnosis of cancer

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BACKGROUND: Patients with cancer have increased rates of clinical distress compared to healthy individuals. Programs are needed to screen patients for distress and make appropriate psychosocial referrals.

OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this study was to describe the distress levels and psychosocial needs of a large, diverse sample of patients with cancer.

METHODS: More than 1,200 adult patients, attending their second appointment with a medical or radiation oncologist, were screened for distress and psychosocial needs. Electronic health records were reviewed to collect demographic data.

FINDINGS: Almost half of the sample reported a clinically meaningful level of distress. Younger age, single status, and female gender were significant predictors of a greater distress score and/or more psychosocial needs. Results suggest that demographic variables may be useful in identifying patients with cancer who are more likely to report higher levels of distress or greater psychosocial needs; these patients should be offered interventions and support services earlier in the treatment process, which may improve outcomes.

KEYWORDS
distress; psychosocial needs; screening; demographics; cancer

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