

The Relationship Between Health Literacy and Illness Self-Care Management in Turkish Patients With Cancer

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OBJECTIVES: To determine the relationship between health literacy and illness self-care management in individuals with cancer.

SAMPLE & SETTING: 207 individuals with cancer undergoing treatment in the chemotherapy unit of a university hospital in Istanbul, Turkey.

METHODS & VARIABLES: Data were collected using a sociodemographic and illness characteristics questionnaire, the European Health Literacy Survey Questionnaire–Turkish Version (HLS-EU-Q-TR), and the Self-Care Management Process in Chronic Illness. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance, student t test, Pearson correlation test, and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS: 86% of individuals displayed an inadequate or problematic to limited level of health literacy. Extended family status and HLS-EU-Q-TR score were significant predictors of self-care management.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Nurses can organize health programs designed to improve the level of health literacy in the population, but they should take into consideration the health literacy levels of their patients.

KEYWORDS health literacy; illness self-care management; patient education; Turkey

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Cancer is a public health issue worldwide, and it is the second leading cause of death in the United States and in Turkey (Siegel et al., 2019; Turkey Ministry of Health, 2017). The International Agency for Research on Cancer (2018) reported that 18.1 million individuals worldwide were diagnosed with cancer in 2018 and that 9.6 million cancer deaths occurred that year; in addition, as of 2018, 43.8 million individuals were alive within five years of a cancer diagnosis. The incidence of cancer is rapidly increasing in Turkey, which is creating a significant socioeconomic burden on society, wreaking material and moral havoc, and causing losses and challenges for individuals (Turkey Ministry of Health, 2017).

Because of medical advances and developments in the field of health care, some cases of cancer can now be treated, whereas others can enter a prolonged period of survival where cancer becomes a chronic ailment (Ovayolu & Ovayolu, 2013). However, after diagnosis and while undergoing treatment, individuals with cancer experience various symptoms related to the illness itself and its treatment. Cancer symptoms affect an individual's general condition, creating stress and deterioration in quality of life (Nichol et al., 2016; Rha et al., 2019). When symptoms are not managed, interruptions in treatment can result (Ovayolu & Ovayolu, 2013). With effective and sustainable illness management, it is possible to diminish illness symptoms, reduce emergency department visits and hospital admissions, limit the physiological and psychological effects of the illness, prevent dependency, and improve quality of life (İncirkuş & Nahcivan, 2015; Zuhur & Özpancar, 2017). Health literacy is reported as an important factor in carrying out effective management of chronic illness (Papadakos et al., 2018; Poureslami et al., 2017; van der Heide et al., 2018).