

A National Survey Exploring How Cancer Health Care Professional's (CHCP) Assess and Manage Anxiety in Patients

Joanne Shaw, Haryana Dhillon, Brian Kelly, Lisa Beatty, Monika Janda, Lisa Lampe, Donna Milne

Health professionals (HPs) commonly encounter patients experiencing anxiety. Due to the potential for improved health outcomes, it is highly relevant that HPs be involved in anxiety management. However, the degree to which cancer HPs engage in the provision of psychosocial care is unknown. The aim of this study was to identify barriers to identification and appropriate management of anxiety in cancer.

Australian oncology HPs completed an online survey between July-September 2019, exploring current clinical practices to identify and manage anxiety in cancer settings, and barriers that arise. Recruitment was via peak cancer professional bodies in Australia through PoCoG, COSA and CNSA membership. The survey explored perceived anxiety prevalence, clinical decision-making including screening practices, and barriers to addressing anxiety as part of cancer care.

146 HPs from both public and private cancer centres completed the survey (PoCoG = 53, COSA = 30, Cancer Nurses = 63). Of these, 126 were complete responses and included in the results. Respondents were primarily nurses (63%), social workers (14%) and physicians (7%) and 78% had been working in oncology for more than 5 years. Reported anxiety prevalence ranged from less than 25% to all patients (median 25-50%) but formal screening was only conducted for 63% of participants. The most commonly encountered challenges to managing anxiety included lack of resources and appropriate staff (26%), long wait times for referral (20%) and patients' unwillingness to discuss emotional issues (18.7%).

Conclusions: This study highlights current anxiety clinical practice and challenges that oncology HPs experience. Understanding the barriers to care is the first step in the development of training resources to assist cancer clinicians to better manage patient anxiety.