

important consequences, communication of bad news, numerous therapeutic failures, administration of treatments with serious side effects, contacts with mutilated/disfigured patients, emotionally loaded relationships, death of patients. A lot of these stressors imply communication with patients, relatives and colleagues. Interventions and strategies have been proposed to help staff to deal with cancer care: staff selection, financial and organisational facilities, staff support groups, and also training opportunities. Psychological training programs are probably the best cost-effective ways of reducing stress in cancer care and of improving satisfaction with care and enhancing quality of care. A research program looking at the effectiveness of training programs aimed at improving health care professionals communication skills has been activated several years ago by our group. The results of two ran studies are showing that training duration is directly related with effectiveness. Moreover these studies are showing the difficulty of trained subjects to transfer their skills into their clinical practice. Results of these studies will be presented and the need to focus further training programs on the transfer of learned communication skills into clinical practice emphasized.

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Do families benefit from psychological intervention?

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Significant cumulative evidence exists to confirm the beneficial effects of modes of intervention on psychological distress, functional adjustment and treatment-related symptoms of patients and families. Most of the studies found repeatedly that the level of psychological distress and adjustment problems reported by patients were either identical or somewhat higher for the partners. Thus, does the partner constitute a support or distress system? If the partner is distressed, is there a relationship between his/her distress and that of the patient? What impact does the illness have on the lives and relationships of the family members? What impact and influence can the family members have on the life process of the illness? The family in general and the partner in particular, therefore, cannot be looked upon as natural supporters for cancer patients, but rather as a system that is itself in need of psychological help and support.