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# CHEMOTHERAPY, COPING AND COMMUNICATION

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**The interactions between physicians, nurses and other healthcare staff and the individual patient are very important in helping to deal with chemotherapy side effects and anxious and depressed thoughts. Communication, whether of information or emotions, in both directions is an important tool to improve the sense of meaningfulness in the life of the patient and the care provider. At the least, feelings of loneliness and of being disconnected should be avoided at all costs.**

Keywords: chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, cancer, coping, hopelessness, emotional distress, communication, meaning, psychotherapy, psychiatry

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## Introduction

The interactions between physicians, nurses and other healthcare staff and the individual patient are very important in helping to deal with chemotherapy side effects and anxious and depressed thoughts. Communication, whether of information or emotions, in both directions is an important tool to improve the sense of meaningfulness in the life of the patient and the care provider. At the least, feelings of loneliness and of being disconnected should be avoided at all costs. Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (CINV) often lead to a reduction in quality of life and more meaningful and better interactions can help the patient to better cope with these side effects.

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### Quality of Life

The significant side effects of chemotherapy, particularly nausea, are still a problem in cancer settings and that these symptoms negatively affect the patients' quality of life.

Happiness, satisfaction and contentment depend on communication with oneself and others, as does the ability to adapt to new circumstances and get one's needs, values and aspirations met. (Haverkamp, 2010a) Especially in situations, where an individual is faced with a new and potentially life-threatening situation, communication is very important. In this regard

### Communication

Psychological factors, namely emotional distress and coping styles play a role in how well the chemotherapy is tolerated. Meaningful

communication, including emotional support, have been associated with less side effects and better outcomes. Social support, such as family support, seems to reduce CINV. However, the relationship between doctor and patient is very important in this respect. Since a relationship is a history of communication in the past and a promise of further communication in the future, (Haverkamp, 2010b, 2017) the communication patterns and the quality and frequency of communication between doctor and patient largely define the relationship, and the therapeutic effect it can have. This relationship is crucial in reducing anxiety and stress and helping the patient's mood.

Studies have shown that that lower levels of anxiety and positive emotions are associated with better CINV-related quality of life, but also underscore the role of maladaptive coping, specifically hopelessness-helplessness, as a specific area that needs to be monitored in cancer settings. In fact, more helplessness and hopelessness has

shown to be associated with increased nausea and a lower quality of life.

## Emotional Distress and Anxiety

Emotional distress, anxiety and patients' expectations may play a role on patients' perception, frequency, intensity and severity of nausea and other chemotherapy-induced side effects. Depression and neuroticism, fear of dying and inability to relax may have an effect of potential side treatment effects. The way in which patients cope with cancer in terms of cognitive and behavioral responses has been shown to influence several aspects of cancer experience, including the quality of life, psychological distress, physical symptoms and pain.

Since meaningful communication helps with anxiety and emotional distress, it is important to become aware of the communication patterns used in a therapeutic setting and to reflect on the health professional's feelings and thoughts and on the interactions as a whole. The patient should be encouraged to become more aware of own feelings, needs and values. Meaningful communication can promote this process.

## Hopelessness and Helplessness

Hopelessness and helplessness can further emotional distress. But they can also make the patient more vulnerable to the subjective

perception of somatic symptoms, such as nausea. Studies suggest that negative affect and depression influence cancer patients' reporting of somatic symptoms. Hopelessness and helplessness can also be worsened by a depression.

Depressed thinking can be helped through meaningful communication, which pays special emphasis on the patient's needs, values and aspirations. This means a communication style which also helps the patient better connect with himself or herself.

## Anticipation

Anticipation of treatment side effects can also increase them and reduce the quality of life. However, it is possible that meaningful communication between healthcare workers and the patient can lead to more strength and positive feelings in the latter, which could lessen the impact of the anticipation.

## Communication and Meaning

More attention should be paid to the interactions between physicians, nurses and other healthcare staff and the individual patient. Communication, whether of information or emotions, in both directions is an important tool to improve the sense of meaningfulness in the life of the patient and the care provider. At the least, feelings of loneliness and of being disconnected should be avoided at all costs.



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