

Abstract

Monitoring Distress and the Effectiveness of Support and Relief Interventions in Hospitalized Patients: A Retrospective Study in the Orthopedic Oncology Unit of the Istituto Ortopedico Rizzoli

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Citation: Iacovone, F. (2026). Monitoring distress and the effectiveness of support and relief interventions in hospitalized patients: A retrospective study in the orthopedic oncology unit of the Istituto Ortopedico Rizzoli. *International Journal of Health Supplements*, 1(Suppl. 2), 128–129. <https://doi.org/10.82051/ijhs-2026-Suppl2>

 Winner of the Best Abstract Award - 2nd Place

Introduction. Distress is a negative experience associated with a cancer diagnosis and can impair the quality of life for patients and their caregivers. Since October 2023, the clinic has systematically assessed distress using the “Distress Thermometer” to initiate support interventions. The aim of this study was to assess distress levels at admission and discharge, analyze changes in distress categories, and evaluate the impact of volunteer activities on patient well-being.

Methods. A retrospective observational study was conducted on 277 patients. Each patient was administered the Distress Thermometer at admission and discharge, along with a satisfaction questionnaire regarding the support activities received.

Results. On average, distress levels decreased from 4.8 to 4.1 ($p < 0.001$). The analysis showed that 72.8% of patients experienced either improvement or stable distress levels. The causes of distress at admission included pain (44.9%) and anxiety (55.9%), with significant improvements in anxiety at follow-up.

Discussion. Despite the slight improvement in distress, volunteer visits did not significantly impact the perceived distress scores. Evaluating the causes of distress provides insights for further improvements in pain and anxiety management. The study highlights the importance of professional and human support in the ward, as well as the value of volunteer activities. Healthcare staff play a crucial role in ensuring a positive perception of the hospitalization experience.

Keywords: Distress, Oncology Patient, Volunteer Support

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Funding: This research received no external funding. **Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.