Discussing psychosocial distress with cancer patients
Evaluation of an online communication training for medical staff in oncology

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Background

Despite the high prevalence of psychosocial distress in cancer patients, medical staff sometimes report difficulty addressing distress adequately. Therefore, we have developed an online training focusing on patient-centered communication skills. The training includes model videos and questions from deliberate practice to enhance learning. The training was developed in a participatory research team including medical staff (*n* = 6) and patients (*n* = 5).

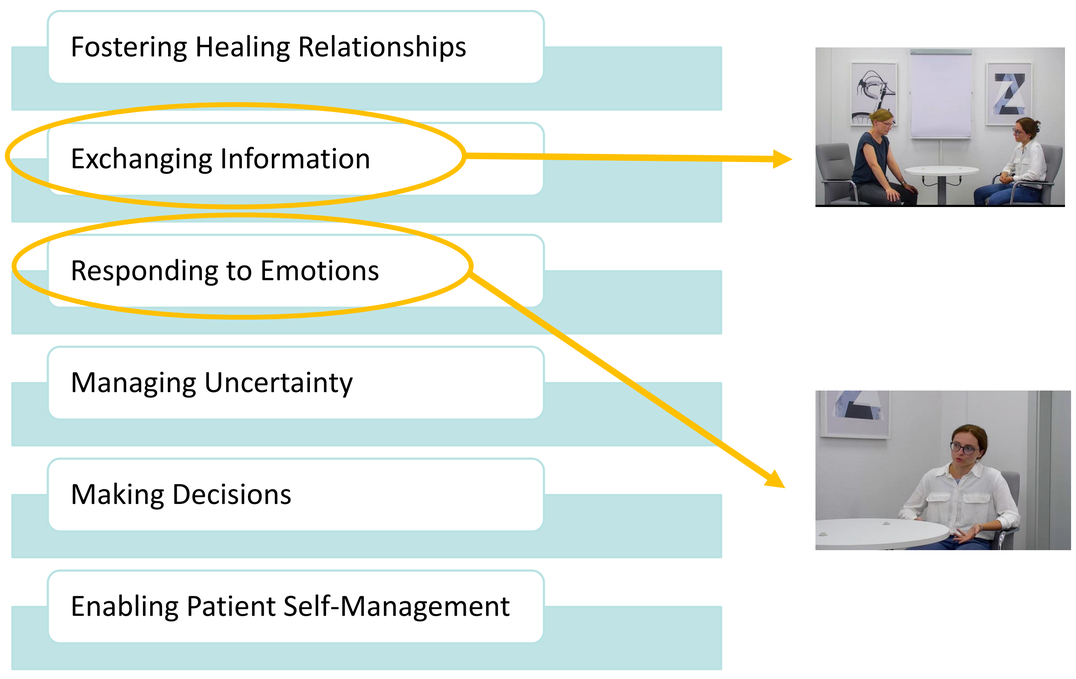


Fig. 1. Patient-centered communication skills (Epstein & Street, 2007)

Study Goals

(1) Provide medical staff with evaluated, easily accessible, and time-efficient training materials.

(2) Investigate if reading information about psychosocial stress, model learning (via videos) and deliberate practice questions improve knowledge about psychosocial distress and communication skills efficiently.

Methods

Online RCT

- Preliminary sample: doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers and medical students

Training

- 60 minutes over 2 days
- 30 min on depression, 30 min on anxiety
- Intervention Groups: Text and video vs. Text only on psychosocial distress and communication skills

Testing

- Open questions following short video vignettes
- MC questions

In the current study, we investigated the short-term (T1) training effect on knowledge and communication skills.

Preregistration
https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/8V9WE

Study link

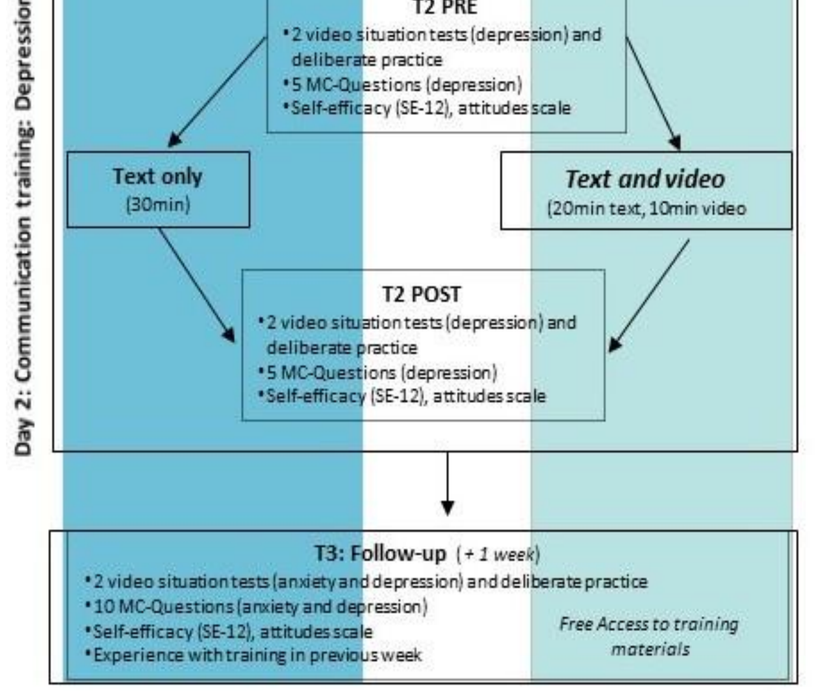
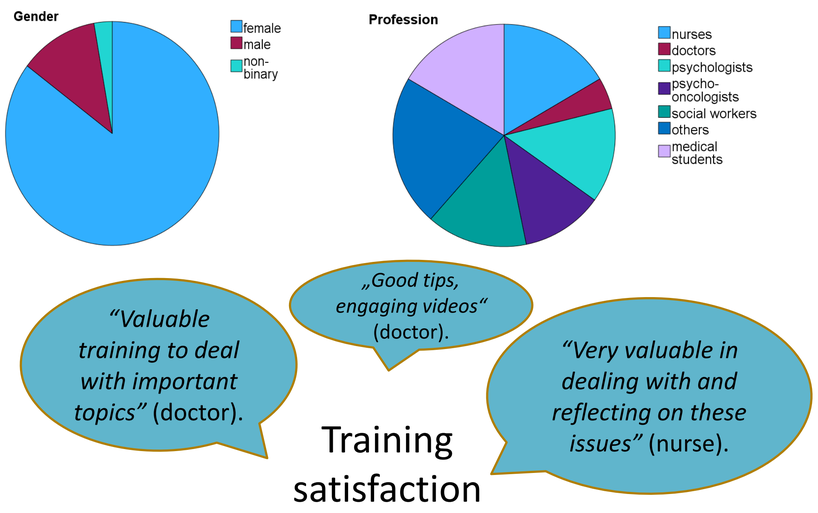


Fig. 2. CG: Control Group; EG: Experimental Group; MC: Multiple Choice.

Results

(1) Preliminary sample

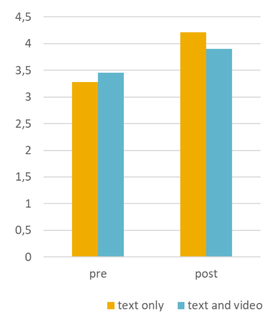
- *n* = 109 medical staff



(2) Knowledge

Pre-post difference of correct MC answers given at T1:

- Text and video group (*M* = 0,45; *SD* = 1,58)
- Text only group (***M* = 0,93**; *SD* = 1,24)

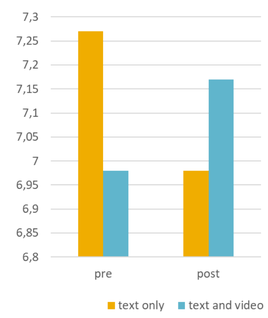


- *t*(107) = 1,78; *p* = .079

(3) Communication Skills

Pre-post difference of correct communication strategies at T1:

- Text and video group (***M* = -0,29**; *SD* = 2,05)
- Text only group (*M* = 0,19; *SD* = 2,08)



- *t*(107) = 1,23; *p* = .222

Discussion

The communication training for medical staff in oncology is still evaluated in an ongoing RCT. In the preliminary sample, there was **no significant** increase of knowledge in the text and video group in comparison to the text-only group for the first part of the training. Descriptively, knowledge was **learned better by the information** provided in texts, and **skills were learned better by giving additional video examples**.

Due to the current composition of the sample, **ceiling effects** regarding knowledge and communication skills became apparent. In addition to the self-indication of communication skills used, future studies could investigate the actual skills that practitioners use in real interactions.

References

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