

Abstract

Research on coping and adjustment to serious and life-threatening diseases showed that although the experience of cancer is usually accompanied by negative outcomes, positive outcomes are also reported by a significant proportion of cancer survivors. In this study meaning and benefit finding are used interchangeably to describe positive outcomes experienced by cancer patients in response to having cancer.

The present study aims at examining the development of meaning found in cancer and at inspecting its associations with adjustment and well-being. The study was also designed to scrutinize the role of coping as a mediator in the relationships between personal and social resources and meaning found in cancer. In collaboration with four hospitals and tumor treatment centers in Berlin, surgery patients were approached twice; in hospitals and clinics and after that questionnaires were mailed to them 1 month, 6 months, and 12 months after surgery.

About 459 patients participated in this study. The average chronological age was 63.03 years ($SD = 10.50$). Finding meaning in cancer was measured by means of a 7-item meaning scale and a 17-item benefit finding scale that measures different types of benefits found in cancer (Taubert & Förster, 2003; Antoni et al., 2001). Social resources assessed in this study refer to received social support and to the presence of a number of support resources (Schwarzer & Schulz, 2000). Personal resources, on the other hand, was assessed by using the general self-efficacy beliefs scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1999). Furthermore, coping with cancer was measured by selected items (Watson & Greer, 1987; Brief COPE; Carver, 1997) that assess accommodation, active coping, and avoidant coping strategies. Adjustment to cancer was measured by using different scales including a negative affect scale (CES-D, 1977), a quality of life scale (EORTC-QLO-C30; Aaronson et al., 1993), and three visual analogue scale measuring pain, fatigue, and impairment attributed to illness.

Results of analyses indicated that cancer patients found meaning and benefited from their experience with cancer and that the perceived meaning increased markedly over time. Results also attest to the presence of a significant relationship between personal resources and meaning that prevailed over time, and to the mediating role of coping in these relationships. Direct marked effect of social resources, in particular received social support, on types of meaning that are related to interpersonal relationship emerged. Finding meaning and benefiting from cancer was also associated with adjustment to cancer. Findings are interpreted and discussed in the light of the context of cancer and the related theories, models, and previous research findings.