

“FEELINGS ARE CHEMICALS, WHICH CAN KILL OR CURE” : HUMOR THERAPY: THE WAY OF BENEFITTING FROM POWER OF FEELING FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Sibel DOĞAN

Assistant Professor, Istanbul Medipol University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Nursing Department, Department of Psychiatric Nursing

Sennur KULA ŞAHİN

Assistant Professor, Istinye University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Medical Surgical Nursing

ABSTRACT

Background:

People with cancer commonly experience a range of symptoms, including pain and various types of physical and emotional distress. Conventional treatments do not always satisfactorily relieve these symptoms, and some patients may not be able to tolerate their side effects. Complementary therapies such as humor therapies can help relieve symptoms and improve physical and mental well-being. This review was made for taking attention to effects of humor therapy as complementary therapies.

Methods: The review was carried out by following search combinations terms of in various databases: complementary therapy, integrated care, laughter therapy, humor therapy, humor and oncology. This review provides a general introduction to application of humor therapy as complementary therapies

Results; The studies that were related to humor therapies for cancer patients have been examined. Humor was defined as one of the most used complementary therapy methods. It has been emphasised that these therapies have many clinical benefits, promoting beneficial physiological changes and an overall sense of well-being. Humor even had long-term effects that strengthened the effectiveness of immune system. It served a therapeutic tool for disorders such as depression, and a coping mechanism. It also was a natural healing component for caregivers trying to cope with the stress and personal demands of their occupations.

Conclusion: As a conclusion; despite being limited, there were studies on humor therapy in patients with cancer, however the reviewed literature was extremely limited about humor therapy used based on different kinds of cancer. Studies showing the effects of humor therapy in different kinds of cancer are required.

Keywords: Complementary therapy, Integrated Care, Laughter Therapy, Humor Therapy, Humor and Oncology

INTRODUCTION

People with cancer commonly experience a range of symptoms, including pain and various types of physical and emotional distress. Conventional treatments do not always satisfactorily relieve these symptoms, and some patients may not be able to tolerate their side effects. Complementary therapies such as humor therapies can help relieve symptoms and improve physical and mental well-being (1-4) . Humor therapy can be the way of benefitting from power of feeling for cancer patients.

The role of feelings or with other word emotions, in physical health has been a central topic in health research. Negative affective styles such as anxiety, depression, and hostility have long been accepted as predictors of increased risk for illness and mortality. In contrast, positive emotions and affective styles have been relatively ignored in the health literature. Positive emotions are defined as feelings that reflect a level of pleasurable engagement with the environment, such as happiness, joy, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment. Humor therapy focuses on uncovering to Positive emotions by use of humor and laughter (5-7). Humor is defined as “any intervention promoting health and well-being by playful discovery, explanation and improvement of absurdity or incongruence of life conditions” and humor can be used as an integrative treatment for physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual wellness and coping (8-9).

“We all know that laughter makes us feel good. What is the reason of feeling good?”

It has been emphasised that humor therapies have many clinical benefits, promoting beneficial physiological changes and an overall sense of well-being. Physiological research in the field of humor and laughter has uncovered amazing results. In the short term, laughter promotes many physiological changes; most notably, it stabilizes blood pressure, massages inner organs, stimulates circulation, facilitates digestion, increases oxygen supply to muscles, decreases muscle tension, and promotes an overall sense of well-being. The most remarkable effect of laughter may produce and release of neuropeptides, including beta endorphine, which acts as pain reducer. Perhaps most interesting is the long-term effects of laughter and the positive emotions that accompany it. Current evidence indicates that cells associated with the immune system (the lymphatic system) are activated through a complex mind-body feedback mechanism. Stress-produced emotions trigger the release of cortisol and aldosterone, which in substantial amounts may actually decrease the Tlymphocyte cell count, thereby impairing the immune response. Conversely, positive thoughts and feelings increase the effectiveness of T-cells and, hence, strengthen the ability of the immune system to operate

against illnesses from common colds to cancer. Thus laughter and positive emotions, including joy, love, faith, hope, confidence, and will, contribute to the strength and integrity of the immune system (10-15).

“Psychologically”;

Humor helps decrease stress and anxiety. Humor provides standing off the problem by figuring out it with a distance between one’s self and the problem. By this way, individual gains abilities of objective thinking and develops behaviors in the direction of these thoughts in stead of negative opinions. So, individual feels more positive and this positivity makes him/her more endurable against stress. Socially; humor enhances interpersonal relationships. Humor also helps strengthen self- esteem of a person (3,4,7,8)

“Use of Humor in Oncology”

Both anger and fear surface while fighting against lifethreatening illnesses such as cancer, and care givers can use humor to help patients control these emotions rather than becoming the victim of them. Similarly, in the rehabilitation of people recovering from substance addictions, humor can help them express negative emotions in a positive light, thus provide relieving feelings of despair and helplessness (4,16-19). “Laughter in and of itself cannot cure cancer or prevent cancer, but laughter as part of the full range of positive emotions including hope, love, faith, strong will to live, determination and purpose, can be a significant and indispensable aspect of the total fight for recovery”. A pilot research project in a cancer center provided humor therapy for adult patients with cancer who had few other resources for adjunctive therapy as hospital inpatients. Patients in a therapy group watched a total of 20 hours of humor videos over 10 sessions of 2 hours each day: once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Patients who watched the videos reported significantly lower levels of overall and treatment-related pain and anxiety following the intervention as well as greater increases in satisfaction with the treatment and care and level of comfort over the course of the study, compared with the control group (20).

Christie and Moore reviewed the laughter research to determine the impact of humor on cancer patients. The most consistent finding was that humor improved pain thresholds, reduced discomfort. The studies also showed the potential of laughter and humor to decrease anxiety and discomfort and to increase NK cell activity which seem to be desirable in this patient population (16).

Humor as a psychological defense mechanism has great importance in oncology. It serves a therapeutic tool for disorders such as depression related with cancer, and a coping mechanism. It is also a natural healing component for caregivers trying to cope with the stress and personal demands of their occupations (7,16,18).

The review was carried out by following search combinations terms of in various databases: complementary therapy, integrated care, laughter therapy, humor therapy, humor and oncology. This review provides a general introduction to application of humor therapy as a complementary therapy. The studies that were related to humor therapies for cancer patients have been examined. It has been emphasised that these therapies have many clinical benefits, promoting beneficial physiological changes and an overall sense of well-being. As a conclusion; despite being limited, there were studies on humor therapy in patients with cancer, however the reviewed literature was extremely limited about humor therapy used based on different kinds of cancer. Studies showing the effects of humor therapy in different kinds of cancer are required.

“Feelings are chemical, they can kill or cure.” -Bernie Siegel- (21)

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