

What is the most appropriate time frame for assessing symptoms? A validation study of the Edmonton Symptom Assessment System-Revised (ESAS-r) in advanced cancer patients

Nekolaichuk C.¹, Watanabe S.^{1,2}, Mawani A.²

¹University of Alberta, Oncology, Edmonton, AB, Canada, ²Cross Cancer Institute, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Aim: The Edmonton Symptom Assessment System (ESAS) is a widely used symptom assessment tool developed for advanced cancer patients. In response to recent concerns regarding the ESAS, a revised version, the ESAS-r, was developed. The ESAS-r offers distinct advantages over the ESAS, by revising problematic items, while still retaining core elements of the ESAS, including assessing symptoms and to compare the tools with similar measures.

Purpose: The overall aim of this study was to gather validity evidence by assessing differences in ESAS-r responses between “now” and “24 hour” assessments, as well as comparing the ESAS-r with a quality of life measure, with symptoms rated “over the past 7 days”.

Methods: 32 cognitively intact advanced cancer patients receiving palliative care services in a tertiary cancer facility completed two versions of the ESAS-r: Form A (rating symptoms “now”) and Form B (rating symptoms “during the last 24 hours”), as well as the EORTC QLQ-C15-PAL, a quality of life measure designed for palliative care. Correlations were calculated using Spearman’s rho (r_s).

Results: Most patients were women (56%), married (72%) and outpatients (75%); average age = 61 (SD 9). Forms A and B were moderately to highly correlated for total symptom distress scores (SDS) ($r_s=.90$) and individual items, ranging from .70 (drowsiness) to .87 (depression). Total SDS for Forms A and B were moderately correlated with the total score for the QLQ-C15-PAL ($r_s=.67$ and .65, respectively).

Conclusions: Using a time frame of “now” versus “during the last 24 hours” did not substantially influence patients’ responses in this predominant outpatient population. The moderately high correlations between the QLQ-C15-PAL and Forms A and B suggest that the ESAS-r is effective for assessing quality of life. Further validity evidence using larger non-metastatic and non-cancer samples is warranted.