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EVALUATION OF COMPLETENESS AND QUALITY OF THE INFORMATION PROCESS DURING GENETIC COUNSELLING FOR CANCER PREDISPOSITION. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE GENETIC COUNSELLING SERVICE (GCS) OF SOUTHERN SWITZERLAND

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Introduction: Phase I studies showed the way information is provided can impact patients' comprehension of risk, their concerns and anxiety, the last two dimensions being generally overestimated by physicians. Informative and relational dimensions of cancer predisposition assessment can affect individuals' quality of life and negatively impact their psychological condition.

Subjects and methods: A pilot prospective survey assessed satisfaction and distress associated with genetic counselling in patients and probands of the GCS of Southern Switzerland. Subjects were given:

1) The STAI (C.D. Spielberger) to evaluate State and Trait Anxiety. 2) A specifically designed questionnaire (26 items) to evaluate informative, emotional and interactive dimensions of the counselling interview and genetic testing indication.

Preliminary results: The survey was conducted in 100 consecutive subjects: 55% affected patients and 45% probands. Age was < 50 years in 53% of subjects, 72% were females and 66% had at least a high school degree. The vast majority of the subjects (84%) reported to be satisfied with the consultation, the proportion being slightly higher in patients (49%) as compared to probands (35%). Sixty-nine per cent of the responders seemed to understand the implications and consequences of genetic testing with no apparent difference between the 2 subgroups. As regards the psychological impact, 70% of the population reported the same level of concern and fear as compared to pre-consultation.

Conclusions and future perspectives: Overall, the preliminary data analysis showed a high degree of satisfaction in terms of well-being during the consultation, clarity and understanding of the information given. The degree of anxiety before and immediately after counselling, as specifically investigated by the STAI instrument, is being currently analysed. Next steps include a detailed qualitative analysis of weaknesses and limits of the questionnaire (i.e. type and formulation of some questions) in order to develop an improved tool to be shared with different cancer genetic services in Northern Italy.

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