

Mild Cognitive Impairments in Cancer Survivors

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Occupational therapists should be aware of the increasing numbers of cancer survivors and the potential effects that cancer treatments have on cognitive functioning and the subsequent impact on performance and participation. This presentation will discuss the results of a pilot study which was undertaken to identify the prevalence of mild cognitive impairment (MCI) in cancer survivors as identified by the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA).

The objectives of this presentation are:

1. To present the variables that might lead to cognitive impairment in persons with cancer
2. To identify the specific cognitive deficits presented in the literature
3. To discuss appropriate evaluation instruments for assess cognitive impairments stemming from cancer and cancer treatments.
4. To present the results of a pilot study undertaken to begin to determine the prevalence of cognitive impairment in cancer survivors and resulting effects on performance.
5. Discuss limitation of this study as well as implications for occupational therapy practice and future research.

The MoCA is a screening tool intended to detect mild cognitive impairment. Mild cognitive impairment is a transitory state between normal cognitive aging and more severe forms of cognitive impairment such as dementia (Nasreddine et al., 2005). The MoCA specifically assesses attention, concentration, executive functions, memory, language, visuospatial skills, conceptual thinking, calculations and orientation.

This pilot study used quantitative and descriptive data from cancer survivors in a large metropolitan city to begin to ascertain the prevalence of mild cognitive impairment in cancer survivors. Thirty-eight cancer survivors were recruited through local cancer support groups and snowballing. The MoCA and a supplemental self-report form were administered to each participant. The results of this pilot project showed a slight percentage of participants with MCI across different types of cancers studied. Additionally, a little more than 60% had some level of difficulty with memory, planning, and attention. In the participants the lowest scores were in areas of language, delayed recall, and visuospatial/executive functioning and the participants that were 1-5 years post treatment had the highest number of participants (47%) with scores 25 or below.