

Attentional bias and treatment related symptoms in breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy: preliminary results of an exploratory study

OANA COBEANU¹

Abstract

Recent research has shown that in the presence of a health condition, selective attentional processing of somatic stimuli is a constant feature and can be associated with poorer levels of general functionality, emotional functionality and health associated behaviors. The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate attentional bias towards chemotherapy symptoms-related stimuli, in breast cancer patients undergoing treatment, in relation to symptom experience. We used a predictive correlational design. 30 patients completed a battery of psychological questionnaires and a computerized task which assesses the presence of an attentional bias towards chemotherapy symptoms related-stimuli (e.g., nausea, vomiting, dizziness), when they are in the presence of neutral stimuli. 17 of the patients showed an attentional bias towards chemotherapy symptoms related-stimuli. Attentional bias did not correlate significantly with self-reported treatment symptoms. We did not find a significant relationship between attentional bias and other psychological factors considered. However, general irrationality was a significant predictor of distress pre-chemotherapy session, [$F(1,28) = 9.808$, $p = 0.004$, $R^2 = .259$, $\beta = .509$], and response expectancies for nausea significantly predicted nausea reported post-chemotherapy, [$F(1,28) = 12.316$, $p = 0.002$, $R^2 = .305$, $\beta = .553$]. Implications are discussed.