



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Oral Oncology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/oraloncology

Validity of the FACT-H&N (v 4.0) among Malaysian oral cancer patients

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 November 2010

Received in revised form 28 April 2011

Accepted 28 April 2011

Available online 23 May 2011

Keywords:

Validity

Head and neck cancer

Oral cancer

Oral cavity

Cross-cultural

Quality of life

Psychosocial factors

SUMMARY

To assess the cross-sectional construct validity of the Malay-translated and cross-culturally adapted FACT-H&N (v 4.0) for discriminative use in a sample of Malaysian oral cancer patients. A cross-sectional study of adults newly diagnosed with oral cancer. HRQOL data were collected using the FACT-H&N (v 4.0), a global question and a supplementary set of eight questions ('MAQ') obtained earlier in pilot work. Of the 76 participants (61.8% female; 23.7% younger than 50), most (96.1%) had oral squamous cell carcinoma; two-thirds were in Stages III or IV. At baseline, patients' mean FACT summary (FACT-G, FACT-H&N, FACT-H&N TOI, and FHNSI) and subscale (pwb, swb, ewb, fwb, and hnsc) scores were towards the higher end of the range. Equal proportions (36.8%) rated their overall HRQOL as 'good' or 'average'; fewer than one-quarter rated it as 'poor', and only two as 'very good'. All six FACT summary and most subscales had moderate-to-good internal consistency. For all summary scales, those with 'very poor/poor' self-rated HRQOL differed significantly from the 'good/very good' group. All FACT summary scales correlated strongly ($r > 0.75$). Summary scales showed convergent validity ($r > 0.90$) but little discriminant validity. The discriminant validity of the FHNSI improved with the addition of the MAQ. The FACT-H&N summary scales and most subscales demonstrated acceptable cross-sectional construct validity, reliability and discriminative ability, and thus appear appropriate for further use among Malaysian oral cancer patients.

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Introduction

Oral cancer is the sixth most common cancer and can seriously affect sufferers' quality of life. Considering the important functional and social role of the oral cavity and its related structures (and anatomical location), oral cancer can be even more debilitating than other forms of cancer.¹ The most difficult challenge in managing oral cancer is the delicate balance between arresting disease progression and not compromising the patient's quality of life.² Thus, specialists must consider patients' perceptions and preferences before choosing the treatment regimen. Patients are often willing to accept a reduced lifespan rather than compromise their quality of life drastically, especially with speaking, eating, and swallowing.³ Understanding the functional, socio-psychological and physical effects of oral cancer would assist medical and dental specialists in appreciating the value that sufferers attach to different aspects of their health-related quality of life.

In Malaysia, such information is lacking, and the condition appears to be silently borne by patients. There is therefore an urgent need for Malaysian dental and medical specialists to be better informed about their oral cancer patients' on-going health-related quality of life (HRQOL) at different stages of their illness, especially

at diagnosis and after commencing treatment. Such information would greatly assist in managing such patients. In order to obtain it, patients' HRQOL measurement would need to be achieved using an instrument that is appropriate for Malaysia's multicultural society. The development of existing disease-specific HRQOL instruments has occurred using more homogenous populations in developed countries, and their suitability for use in Malaysia is untested.

The purpose of this study was to determine the cross-sectional validity of the cross-culturally adapted FACT-H&N (v 4.0) instrument for discriminative use among Malaysian oral cancer patients.

Patients and methods

In earlier work—using quantitative and qualitative evaluations by an expert group (18 medical, nursing, and dental specialists actively managing oral cancer patients throughout Malaysia)—the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy (FACT) scale⁴ (v 4.0), a modular disease-specific instrument, was selected over both the European Organization of Research and Treatment for Cancer (EORTC)⁵ and the University of Washington Quality of Life (UW-QOL)⁶ instruments for use in Malaysia. The Malay-translated FACT-H&N (v 4.0) was pre-tested for face validity and content validity, then cross-culturally adapted for the Malaysian context in terms of its conceptual and operational equivalence. This pre-testing was

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