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An Ethnoscience Approach to Develop a Cross-Cultural Understanding of Fatigue

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Background

Fatigue attributable to cancer and its treatment is a cause of distress around the world, but comparisons of fatigue among people from various countries is limited. Understanding the influence of socio-cultural contexts on fatigue could help health care professionals communicate more clearly with patients and potentially aid in the development of any modifications required to fatigue interventions.

Objectives:

The objectives of this study are to compare the descriptions of fatigue provided by individuals with advanced cancer living in Canada, Thailand, England, and Italy and use them to refine conceptual definition of fatigue as outlined in the Edmonton Fatigue Framework (2008).

Methods

A qualitative approach based on ethnoscience is being used to compare the way participants from each study populations use language to describe fatigue. Data are being collected using two semi-structured interviews, incorporating a card sort technique, and then used to construct taxonomies showing the dimension of fatigue in each population. The taxonomies will be compared to show similarities and differences across study population. Data collection in Canada (n=27) and Thailand (n=10) is complete, but is still underway in England and Italy.

Results

Preliminary analysis shows that while both “body” and “mind” are central to the nature of fatigue in all four study populations, the dimensions within these two central domains vary. For example, “cognitive function” was central to “mind” in the Canadian data set, but “blurred consciousness”, a more spiritually-oriented concept, was central to “mind” in the Thai data set.

Conclusions

Our team has developed strategies utilising ethnoscience to advance understanding of cancer-related fatigue and thereby contribute to the development of a globally relevant conceptual framework for fatigue management. It is envisioned that the study will stimulate discussion surrounding the ways culture shapes the meaning of illness and therefore influence directions toward culturally sensitive interventions.