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Psychological Adjustment to Lung Cancer: the Role of Self-compassion and Social Support

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Introduction: The impact of the diagnosis of an oncologic disease is well-known in terms of psychological adjustment and quality of life. On the other hand it is known that depressive symptoms may also overlap the physical symptoms of cancer and cancer treatment, which may interfere in their detection and appropriate treatment approach.

Objectives: The aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between psychological adjustment to lung cancer, self-compassion, social support and emotional negative states in patients with lung cancer.

Method: Fifty-five patients diagnosed with lung cancer (38 men and 17 women) with ages ranging from 44 to 87 years old participated in the study. A set of self-report instruments was used: the Mini Mental Adjustment to Cancer Scale (MiniMac), the Self-compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003), the Social Support Satisfaction Scale (SSSS) and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21).

Results: Significant correlations were found between psychological adjustment and emotion regulation strategies (self-compassion), social support and psychopathology. The predictive model for depressive symptomatology and psychological adjustment (as assessed by the helpless/hopeless dimension) includes mindfulness as a significant predictor. Regarding the predictive model for stress, the satisfaction level with support from friends revealed to be an important element.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest that these patients may benefit, in their therapeutic approach, from the development of this kind of strategies (new ways of relating themselves with their emotional experiences and quality of their social networks) in order to promote a better psychological adjustment to their clinical condition.