

Improving emotional distress in patients undergoing peripheral blood stem cell transplantation

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INTRODUCTION

Research has revealed that cancer patients have been suffering from long-term emotional distress, and patients receiving stem cell transplants not only have to face the side effects of the high-dose chemotherapy but also have to remain in isolation wards due to the nature of the disease, making them even more vulnerable to emotional distress. The statistics indicated that 74% of the transplant patients in our ward in 2019-2020 had emotional distress and expressed an inclination to verbal violence during their treatment. This affects not only their quality of life but also puts the frontline caregivers at risk of violence. For this reason, the motivation behind this research is to improve the quality of care by exploring the main causes of emotional distress and addressing them.

METHOD

The analysis of the current situation revealed the following:

1. the low correlation rate of the nursing staff's cognition of emotional distress assessment was related to the lack of relevant training and the lack of consensus assessment methods;
2. patients did not understand the transplantation process, had fear of unbearable side effects, were unable to adapt to the isolation ward environment, and did not understand the content of emotional distress assessment;
3. the absence of a dedicated counseling channel and the inadequacy of the routine process of psychological care for transplant patients.

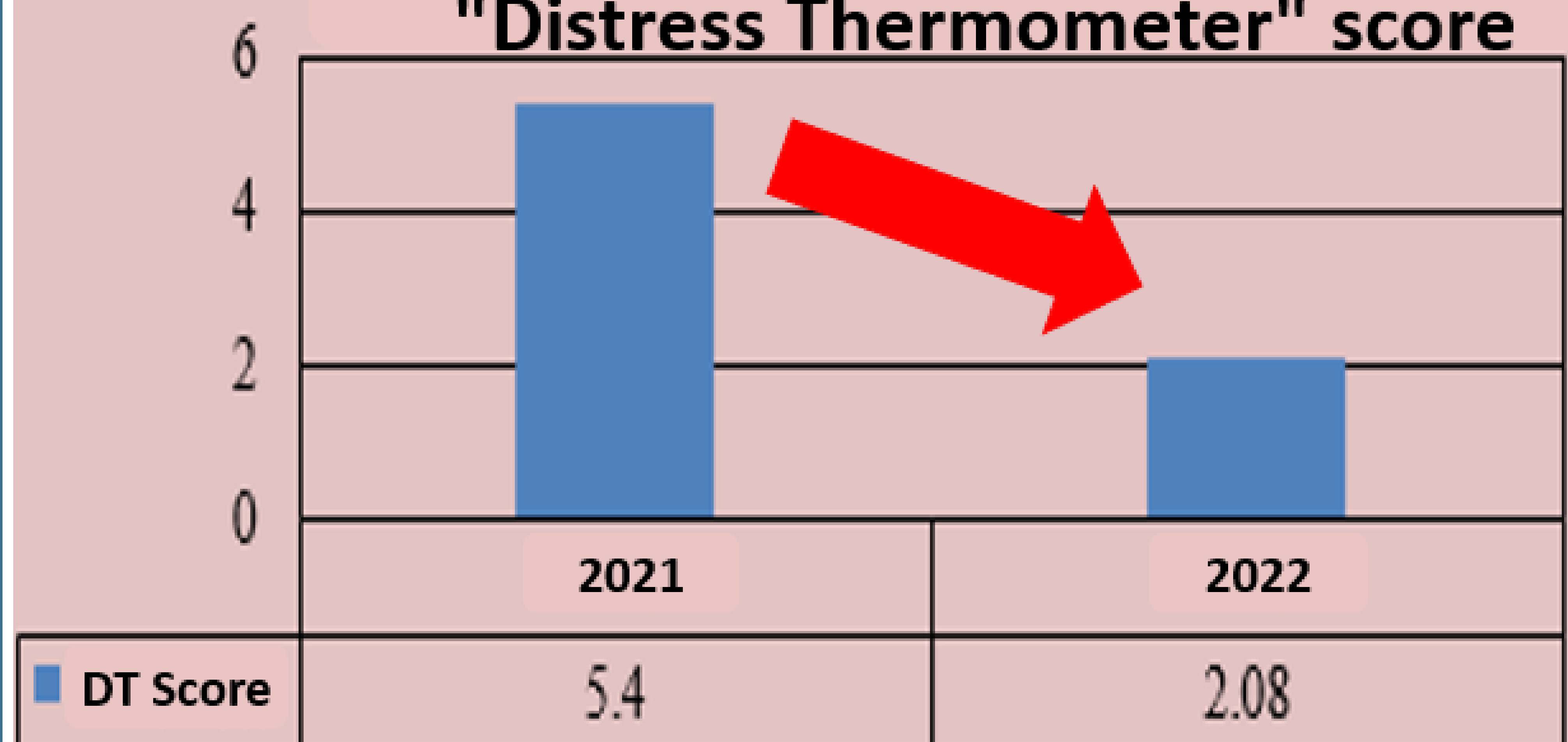
The project team developed a feasible improvement program based on the causes. For example, organizing training courses, revising psychological care protocols and procedures in the transplantation ward, incorporating psychologists into the transplant care team, decorating the environment in the ward, creating transplantation ward daily routines, providing health education on emotional distress and self-care skills, seeking the consent of patients who have completed their transplantation and filming their personal experiences, while using artificial intelligence (AI) technology to create an account called "Reaching Your Heart" on the LINE@ platform to promote awareness of assessment among the nursing staff and to reduce the level of emotional distress of patients.

RESULTS

Following 9 months of program improvement, the average decrease in transplant patients' emotional distress scores was 72.92%, and the accuracy rate of nursing staff's assessment of transplant patients' emotional distress increased from 52% to 100%, which met the objectives of the program.



Transplant patients' average "Distress Thermometer" score



CONCLUSIONS

Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation brings cancer patients a ray of hope, but due to the risks, the high complexity of the procedure, and the isolated environment of transplantation, patients and their families are often surrounded by fear of side effects, rejection, and isolation, resulting in a fear of being unable to self-care and emotional distress, which may even affect the progress of the disease. Psychological problems in cancer patients should be detected early and receive appropriate care. In Europe and the United States, "emotional distress" has been recognized as the sixth vital sign, but it is still in its early stages in our country. If assessment and timely intervention can be promoted continuously, it will be helpful to enhance the psychological comfort of patients during treatment.