Oral Communication

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Mapping Functioning in Head and Neck Cancer Survivors: A Content Comparison Using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF)

Topic: ICF

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BACKGROUND

Head and neck cancer (HNC) treatment results in complex functional impairments affecting communication, swallowing, breathing, and overall quality of life (QoL). The ICF provides a comprehensive framework for assessing these sequelae. This study aimed to analyze how the ICF domains are represented in published HNC research, identifying the most frequently reported categories to assess whether current literature provides a holistic view of functioning.

METHODS

A content comparison was conducted using the ICF Core Sets for HNC as a reference. Articles published between 2013 and 2023 were retrieved from PubMed and screened for references to ICF domains. Reported sequelae and functional impairments were classified into body functions, body structures, activities and participation, and environmental factors, following the ICF framework.

RESULTS

Fifty three studies were included. Most frequently described ICF categories were swallowing functions (b510, 84.9%), sensation of pain (b280, 71.7%), energy and drive functions (b130, 66%), and voice functions (b310, 58.5%). Regarding body structures, the most commonly reported categories were structures of the digestive system (s520, 64.2%), structures of the respiratory system (s430, 60.4%), and head and neck structures (s710, 50.9%). In contrast, activities and participation were underrepresented, with eating (d550, 45.3%), speaking (d330, 34%), and interpersonal interactions (d720, 30.2%) being the most frequently cited categories. Environmental factors, such as support from family (e310, 26.4%) and healthcare providers (e355, 18.9%), were the least frequently reported. The most commonly described interventions targeted dysphagia rehabilitation (33.9%), speech therapy (33.9%), and physical therapy (22.6%), particularly for shoulder dysfunction and trismus.

CONCLUSION

Head and neck cancer literature primarily focuses on body function impairments, while ICF domains related to activity, participation, and environmental influences remain underrepresented. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of patients' lived experiences and rehabilitation needs. Future research should integrate broader ICF-based assessments to develop more holistic and patient-centered rehabilitation strategies.

Statement of Disclosures

None

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