How a Mobile App Supports Advanced Cancer Patients in Palliative Care

Those who used a mobile app for weekly symptom questionnaires maintained their quality of life and experienced fewer hospitalizations.

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SUPPORT+, a mobile app that sends patients a weekly questionnaire regarding their physical and emotional symptoms, "helped patients with advanced cancer maintain their quality of life better at 18 weeks than those who did not use the app," according to a randomized controlled trial published in Oncology led by Wing-Lok Chan, MBBS, of the University of Hong Kong. The findings were presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting (ASCO 2026) in Chicago.

"People with cancer frequently suffer from symptoms such as pain, fatigue or sleep disturbance and often bear those symptoms silently. When patients are able to report symptoms and receive help, they feel better, and that can lead to better outcomes. This trial adds to the evidence base that patients—with high-quality reporting and interventions—can improve their symptoms and their quality of life," said Toby Christopher Campbell, MD, MS, a thoracic medical oncologist and health chief of palliative care at the University of Wisconsin, in an ASCO press release.

Campbell added that potential users must meet at least one requirement: "As the trial uses a mobile app for symptom monitoring, patients need to be savvy enough to interact with an app and implement the instructions given."

Palliative care, a special approach for caring for people with a serious illness, helps cancer patients and caregivers manage symptoms and side effects, according to the American Cancer Society. While current palliative care requires "cancer patients to proactively report any new or worsening symptoms to their healthcare team," the app, according to an ASCO perspective on the study, "offers practical guidance on how to manage any mild or moderate symptoms using both non-medication and medication strategies" and "can help people with advanced cancer better maintain their quality of life and reduce their need for unplanned hospitalization."

The clinical trial followed 1,214 patients with advanced solid malignant neoplasms who declined cancer treatment in favor of palliative care at one of six clinics in Hong Kong. The patients were randomly assigned to use the SUPPORT+ mobile app or to follow usual palliative care instructions for 18 weeks. Individuals in the usual care group had standard outpatient palliative care visits every four to 12 weeks and self-reported any symptoms to their healthcare team between visits. The primary endpoint was patient quality of life, which was measured via questionnaires about patients' anxiety/depression, mobility, self-care, usual activities and pain/discomfort. Patient self-efficacy, emergency department visits and hospitalizations were also measured throughout the trial.

In the intention to treat analysis, which included all 1,214 patients regardless of whether they followed through on advice and used the app, those who used SUPPORT+ maintained a better quality of life, with scores increasing from 0.49 to 0.52 at 18 weeks, while the usual care group experienced a drop from 0.50 to 0.38. Similarly, health scores increased from 63.2 to 65.7 for those using the mobile app and declined in the usual care group from 63.9 to 59.7.

For secondary health outcomes, SUPPORT+ users experienced a 12.4% decline in self-efficacy, while the usual care group experienced a decline of 17.4%, though this finding was not statistically significant. Emergency department visits were similar between the two groups, but those who used the app experienced fewer hospital admissions and shorter hospital stays.

When looking only at those who completed their assigned intervention, which included 633 people, quality of life and health scores declined in both groups, which is to be expected for people receiving palliative care. Still, the decline was smaller in the group using the mobile app.

"Patients with advanced cancer experience a heavy and fluctuating symptom burden while living primarily in the community. Care is still largely reactive, relying on patients or caregivers to seek help when symptoms worsen. This randomized clinical trial demonstrates that proactively monitoring symptoms using a digital platform, combined with timely nurse follow-up, can help maintain quality of life and reduce unplanned hospitalizations," said Chan in an ASCO press release.

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http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/mobile-app-supports-advanced-cancer-patients-palliative-care