



# Research Week 2022

## Demoralization and Cancer: What are the Risk Factors?

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### Keywords

Demoralization, cancer, depression, adjustment disorder, oncology

### Abstract

#### Background

Demoralization is a psychological response consisting of low morale, poor coping, and loss of purpose and meaning. It is often seen in conjunction with depression in cancer patients, and presents a significant mental health challenge to normal functioning during and after treatment.

#### Objective

The purpose of this review is to determine factors associated with the development of demoralization in cancer patients, holding in consideration the frequently parallel incidence of demoralization with depression.

#### Methods

A comprehensive search of the literature using the OVID Medline database was conducted using subject headings and key words: demoralization, cancer, depression, adjustment disorder, and oncology. This resulted in 1417 articles. After additional screening by title, abstract, and full article, and application of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria, 21 articles were identified. Manual searches identified 2 additional articles for a total of 23 peer-reviewed articles.

#### Results

The findings of this literature review suggest that demoralization can be a substantial issue for cancer patients; although demoralization is significantly related to depression, the two are different psychological states. Other factors consistently associated with demoralization include poorly controlled physical symptoms, previous diagnosis of anxiety, educational level, unemployment, diminished social function, and single relationship status.

#### Conclusion

A clinically-significant portion of cancer patients are affected by demoralization. An overview of the literature examining factors associated with demoralization in cancer patients reveals physical symptoms, diagnosis of anxiety or depression, educational level, employment status, and marital status are significantly related to demoralization. There is a strong positive correlation between depression and demoralization, indicating that early screening for depression in cancer patients may also help to identify and address demoralization. Limitations of this review include a single

large database search, and the availability of very few longitudinal studies within the search, and limitation in variability of studies.