

Potential and challenges of virtual reality in improving the quality of life of palliative care patients



Letter to the Editor

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Dear Editor,

We carefully read the recently published article entitled “The effects of virtual reality interventions on occupational participation and distress from symptoms in palliative care patients: A pilot study” by Corvin et al. (2024) published recently in *Palliative and Supportive Care*. The study explored the effects of virtual reality (VR) intervention on occupational participation and distress symptoms in palliative care patients. This topic is particularly important in a broader context as palliative care aims to holistically address end-of-life needs and alleviate the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual suffering of terminal illness (Corpuz 2024; Pohan and Astuti 2024). Given that palliative care is a fundamental human right (Ezer et al. 2018), pragmatic research that can improve palliative care services is needed. This study highlights the potential of VR technology as a safe and effective adjunctive therapeutic modality to promote mental health and reduce symptom distress in palliative care patients.

The study found that the VR intervention significantly improved participants’ occupational performance and satisfaction, and reduced distress from symptoms such as pain and fatigue (Corvin et al. 2024). This supports previous research showing that VR can be an effective method to reduce psychological distress and promote mental health in palliative care patients (Mo et al. 2022). To implement VR interventions in palliative care, medical institutions need to integrate personalized VR sessions based on patient goals and preferences. This can include reminiscence therapy, guided meditation, or virtual experiences of places that are meaningful to the patient (Goodall et al. 2021). It is also important to involve occupational therapists in designing and supervising these sessions, as well as providing adequate training and technical support for the use of VR technology.

The implementation of VR interventions can provide many specific benefits, including increased participation in meaningful daily activities, reduction of distress symptoms such as pain and fatigue, and improved overall quality of life (Ioannou et al. 2020; Zeng et al. 2018). In addition, VR interventions can help patients feel more connected and empowered, despite facing significant physical and cognitive limitations.

However, the use of VR in palliative care also faces some challenges. First, there are technical issues, such as the need for compatible devices and a stable internet connection, which can limit the accessibility and quality of the VR experience (Halbig et al. 2022). In addition, not all patients may be comfortable or familiar with VR technology, which requires additional time for orientation and training (McGrath et al. 2018). There is also a small risk of side effects such as nausea or discomfort that need to be carefully managed (Huang et al. 2022). Lastly, the cost of VR devices and technical support can be an obstacle for some healthcare institutions.

Although there are some challenges in its application, the benefits of VR in innovative non-pharmacological approaches to reduce distress symptoms and increase occupational participation of palliative care patients are far greater (McGhee et al. 2024). So, by adopting VR interventions in palliative care, we are investing heavily in a new generation of health workers who are more competent and place the holistic well-being of patients as the top priority in health care.

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