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Barriers and Facilitators to Implementing Exercise Therapy in Pediatric Oncology in Germany: A Mixed-Methods Study of Patient and Healthcare Professional Perspectives

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Introduction: Quality-assured oncological exercise therapy (qOET) is increasingly recognized as a safe and effective supportive intervention to improve physical functioning, reduce treatment-related adverse effects, and enhance quality of life in pediatric cancer patients. However, its integration into routine care remains inconsistent, highlighting the need to identify key barriers and facilitators for implementation.

Methods: As part of the nationwide IMPLEMENT project on the implementation of qOET, funded by the German Cancer Aid, pediatric cancer patients and their legal guardians from 12 German pediatric oncology centers completed baseline online or paper-pencil surveys (n=69; median age 11 [IQR 8-15] years; 46% female). Additionally, semi-structured interviews (n=15) were conducted to capture experiences with qOET as well as perceived motivators and barriers to physical activity. Follow-up surveys and interviews are currently ongoing.

In parallel, healthcare professionals from 15 participating centers completed baseline online questionnaires (n=52; median age 34 [IQR 29-44] years; 75% female) and semi-structured interviews (n=15). The interview guide was developed drawing on the updated Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), and was informed by a prior CFIR-based survey among key stakeholders at the participating clinics. A follow-up survey with the same stakeholders is ongoing.

All interview recordings are pseudonymized, externally transcribed, and examined using framework analysis, supported by MAXQDA software. Qualitative findings will be triangulated with quantitative data using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach.

Results/Perspective: Data collection is ongoing, with final assessments scheduled for March 2026. The analyses aim to identify key facilitators and context-specific determinants for implementing qOET by comparatively examining perspectives of pediatric cancer patients, their families, and healthcare professionals. The findings are expected to provide practice-oriented insights to support the sustainable integration of qOET into pediatric oncology care and will be incorporated into guidelines and implementation strategies, e.g. through the Network ActiveOncoKids. Final results will be presented at the conference.

Keywords

pediatric oncology; exercise therapy; implementation research; mixed-methods

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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