

## **THE IMPACT OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT ON NURSES' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND THE QUALITY OF CARE PROVIDING IN AMBULATORY ONCOLOGY CLINICS**

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**Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to identify the relationship between the physical environment and nurses' psychological distress in ambulatory oncology clinics in Germany.

**Method:** Sixty-two oncology nurses from fifteen clinics participated in short interviews. Psychological well-being and work satisfaction were assessed with a self-rating questionnaire. The questionnaire was connected to a mental map, drawn by the participants. The mental map represented a route running through the nurses' workspace, identifying stressful spaces and obstacles.

**Results and discussion:** The investigated clinics could be divided into two types: the traditional type and the innovative type. The innovative type differed from the traditional in 7 aspects. Nurses providing care in the 'innovative type' had significantly higher satisfaction scores on the physical environment and felt less distressed than nurses providing care in the 'traditional type'. Surprisingly, principal component analysis revealed that only 3 of the environmental aspects contributed to higher scores of well-being, in turn leading to a higher self-estimated quality of care providing: a) the supply of private space to take time-outs while coping with psychologically burdening situations, b) the possibility of withdrawal with patients and families, and c) the size of the working space. The nurses felt being observed, pressured and less concentrated in a clinical setting if there was not enough space between their own activity areas and those of the patients or colleagues.

**Conclusions:** Psychological distress affects both the quality of care delivered to patients and the professional life of the caregiver. Especially in oncology, the development of effective teams, good relationships with patients and positive coping mechanisms appear to be protective. However, one important supportive factor is still missing: the impact of the design of the working space on the mental health of care providers. Our study provides evidence that it is highly important to integrate this aspect into the future of oncology care planning.