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## **Challenges in recruiting of head and neck cancer patients to participate in home exercise study**

Herausforderungen bei der Rekrutierung von Patienten mit Mund-, Kiefer-, Gesichts- und Halstumoren für Teilnahme an einer Heimtrainingsstudie

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**Purpose:** Physical activity interventions are reported to bear considerable benefit for head and neck cancer patients (HNSCC pts). Some studies have shown that HNSCC pts prefer exercise at home, alone and with moderate intensity. To address this preferences we conceived a holistic exercise program and evaluated the concept in a pilot study regarding its feasibility and achieved effects<sup>1</sup>. In an ongoing multicenter study, this exercise program is evaluated into a home based setting<sup>2,3</sup>. Preliminary data show that the recruitment of 60 HNSCC pts is challenging. Herein we analyzed characteristics of those consenting or not consenting to participate in the study.

**Methods:** Direct response of HNSCC pts in tumor aftercare consultation including recording of interest in participation or reasons for refusal.

**Results:** Of 134 HNSCC pts surveyed (82% male), 12 expressed interest (9%). Of these, eight (6%) consented to participate. Three additional pts were included via a self-aid group. Of the currently included 11 pts 55% are female. The average age is  $71 \pm 7$  years. Seven (64%) HNSCC pts have a (technical) high school diploma. By self-report, seven (64%), are non-smokers, three (27%) are ex-smokers, and one (9%) is a smoker. Nine of 11 were active in sports before the disease. The main reasons for refusal were "independently active" (N = 47), "no complaints" (N = 31), and "no interest" (N = 23).

**Conclusion:** In sum, the recruitment rate is low. The HNSCC pts recruited do not reflect the typical HNSCC pts (male, smoker, lower educational level). Therefore, consideration should be given to using monetary incentives to increase the motivation to participate.

## **Reference:**

1. Felser S et al., Integrative cancer therapies 2020; 19: 1-12
2. Felser S et al., ONCOLOGY RESEARCH AND TREATMENT 2020; 43 (SUPPL 4): 134
3. DRKS-ID: DRKS00023883