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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore symptom burden and its relationship to functional performance in patients with COPD. A descriptive, cross-sectional, correlational survey design was used and a sample of 214 patients with COPD. The sample was recruited from patients attending one of the major teaching hospitals in Dublin. Symptom burden was measured using the Memorial Symptom Assessment Scale (MSAS), and the functional performance was measured using the Functional Performance Inventory-Short Form (FPI-SF). Findings revealed that participants experienced a median of 13 symptoms. The most burdensome symptoms were shortness of breath, lack of energy, difficulty sleeping, worrying, dry mouth, feeling nervous, feeling irritable, and feeling sad. Participants with very severe COPD had the greatest symptom burden, followed by those with severe COPD, moderate COPD, and mild COPD. Symptom burden was higher for the psychological symptoms compared to the physical symptoms. Participants with mild COPD had the highest functional performance, followed by those with moderate COPD, very severe COPD, and severe COPD. Twenty symptoms were negatively correlated with overall functional performance, indicating that high symptom burden for those symptoms was associated with low overall functional performance. Moderate, negative, statistically significant correlations were found between the total symptom burden and overall functional performance, physical symptom burden and overall functional performance and psychological symptom burden and overall functional performance. A negative linear relationship was found between total symptom burden and overall functional performance among all stages of COPD except the mild group. No relationship was found between total symptom burden and overall functional performance for the moderate group. Healthcare professionals need to broaden the clinical and research assessment of physical and psychological symptoms in COPD; alleviating the burden of these symptoms may promote improved functional performance.