

Screening for Psychological Distress in Nephrology: The Hemodialysis Distress Thermometers

Helena Sousa¹, Oscar Ribeiro¹, Daniela Figueiredo²

Worldwide, hemodialysis is the cornerstone treatment for kidney failure, and Portugal is the European country with the highest unadjusted prevalence of people receiving this kidney therapy¹. Hemodialysis is extremely demanding and frequently associated with heightened psychological distress in those undergoing this life-sustaining treatment and their families, usually known as “hidden patients”. Despite this awareness, the psychosocial needs of this population remain poorly understood and largely unaddressed, often due to the lack of pragmatic and psychometrically sound patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) available for use in nephrology care contexts.

The *Hemodialysis Distress Thermometer for Patients* (HD-DT)² and the *Hemodialysis Distress Thermometer for Caregivers* (HD-DT-C)³ are two easy-to-complete, clinically useful, valid, and reliable PROMs aiming to simplify the triage of psychological distress and its sources (physical, emotional, social/family, and dialysis-specific) among adults on hemodialysis and their informal caregivers. Both measures were developed by a research team from the University of Aveiro with a history of fruitful scientific collaborations and solid experience in investigating the psychosocial dimensions of kidney failure, and are published in highly recognized international scientific journals (*Psychology & Health* and *Quality of Life Research*).

Since made public, the HD-DT and the HD-DT-C have received several requests for translation and validation by clinicians and researchers from countries with an elevated prevalence of people on hemodialysis, such

as Brazil, Türkiye, and China. This global outreach is an important step in raising awareness of the urgency of strengthening psychosocial screenings and interventions in dialysis units worldwide. To date, both European Portuguese and American English versions of the HD-DT and the HD-DT-C are available.

References

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[2] Sousa, H., Ribeiro, O., & Figueiredo, D. (2024). Development process, clinical utility, and preliminary psychometric evidence of a new tool for screening psychological distress in renal care settings: the Hemodialysis Distress Thermometer (HD-DT). *Psychology & Health*, 1–27. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2024.2347662>

[3] Sousa, H., Ribeiro, O., & Figueiredo, D. (2024). The Hemodialysis Distress Thermometer for Caregivers (HD-DT-C): development and testing of the psychometric properties of a new tool for screening psychological distress among family caregivers of adults on hemodialysis. *Quality of Life*, 33 (6), 1513–1526. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-024-03627-x>

¹ – CINTESIS@RISE & Department of Education and Psychology, University of Aveiro.
² – CINTESIS@RISE & School of Health Sciences, University of Aveiro.

FIGURE 1
The tripartite structure of the HD-DT and the HD-DT-C.

FIGURE 2
The front page of the HD-DT includes the definition of psychological distress and the distress barometer.

