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Feasibility and acceptability of an interactive mobile phone system for collecting and managing patient reported symptoms in prostate cancer

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Introduction
For immediate and continuous dialogue between patients and caregivers new approaches in modern technology are encouraged today. So far, there is not sufficient evidence for the effects of interactive health communication systems. In cooperation with a Swedish health management company, we developed an interactive mobile phone based monitoring system for the assessment of symptoms and wellbeing and generation of instant self-care advice including an alerting function of severe symptoms with instant access to professionals in real time. By using this technique patients can communicate symptoms with instant support while cared for out-side hospital but at the same time reassured that their condition is monitored by the professionals. The objective of this study was to evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of the system for patients with prostate cancer and for the involved health care staff.

Material and methods
Evidence-based symptoms and related self-care advices were implemented in the application after literature review and interviews with patients and health care professionals. Nine patients diagnosed with prostate cancer undergoing radiotherapy treatment were recruited to test the application in two weeks. Subsequently, they were interviewed, individually and in focus groups, about their experience. Nurses directly involved in the care and treatment of the participating patients were interviewed at the end of study.

Results
Overall, patients and nurses reported positive experiences of using the mobile phone system. The patients considered the application helpful and easy to use although there were some suggestions for further elaboration on the rating scale and the meaning of the symptoms. Most of the patients had read the self-care advice and found them useful. The alerting system was activated in several cases; the nurses found it useful to identify and manage problematic symptoms early and the patients felt safe and well cared for. Some of the nurses thought the monitoring system was time-consuming.

Conclusions
Both patients and nurses could see the potential for using the mobile application in clinical practice. The system enables the involvement of the patients and the alerts showed problematic symptoms promoting timely interventions. The results support further development and testing of the system in full-scale.