

Navigating ethical challenges in the FORTEe randomised-controlled trial: A multi-centre staff survey on exercise intervention for children and adolescents undergoing cancer treatment

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BACKGROUND AND AIMS

- Exercise interventions improve outcomes in paediatric oncology.
- RCTs introduce ethical challenges.
- HCP perspectives remain under-explored.

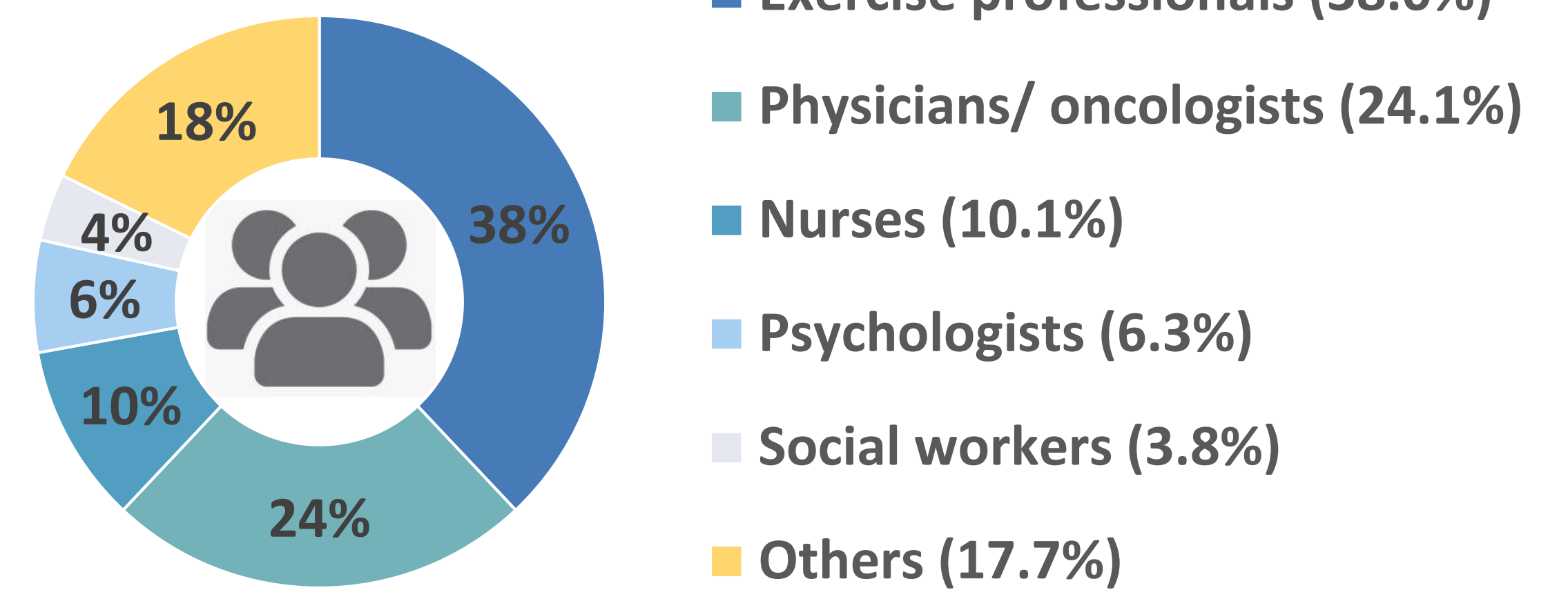
METHODS

- Multicentre survey (10 European FORTEe sites).
- Completed by n= 79 HCPs
 - 73% female, 27% male
- Mixed methods (quantitative & qualitative).

RESULTS

- **86.1% Benefits > Burden** (improvements in patients' recovery and well-being).
- **Ethical tensions:** child autonomy vs parental influence; research vs well-being; burden vs benefit; emotional strain/moral distress (particularly related to relapse, disease progression, or death).
- **Sustainability:** while some centres successfully integrated exercise programmes into standard care, others noted sustainability gaps and inequities in access beyond the trial.

Participant characteristics of 79 healthcare professionals (45% response rate) in the FORTEe survey, showing professional background distribution.



KEY QUESTION

How do healthcare professionals navigate benefit–burden evaluations, child autonomy, and moral distress when implementing exercise in paediatric oncology trials?

Ethical strengths

- Positive overall ethical evaluation (Beneficence)
- Low perceived burden (Non-maleficence)
- Child-centred processes (Autonomy)



Real-world ethical challenges emerged within an overall positive ethical RCT climate

Ethical Challenges

- Assent tensions
- Fairness (control group)
- Moral distress

CONCLUSION

- Ethically sound trials can still be ethically challenging in practice.
- Key tensions emerge in child autonomy, fairness, and moral distress.
- Embedding ethical reflection into everyday clinical-research practice is crucial.

LITERATURE Navigating ethical challenges in the FORTEe randomised controlled trial: a multi-centre staff survey on exercise intervention for children and adolescents undergoing cancer treatment. Alt F, Dreismickenbecker E, Lanfranchi F, Balduzzi A, Watson E, Marriott H, Wiskemann J, Bauer N, Mongondry R, Fridh MK, Lucia A, Fiuza-Luces C, Beller R, Spreafico F, Konda B, Stefanović M, Diel H, Kühn M, Wypyrsczyk L, Paul NW, Neu MA, Faber J; FORTEe Consortium. BMC Med Ethics. 2026 Feb 25;27(1):45. doi: 10.1186/s12910-026-01414-6.

