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Cancer related fatigue in patients receiving chemotherapy: A single institutional study from Northern India

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Introduction: Fatigue is one of the most disabling phenomena among patients receiving anti cancer treatment, which has profound effect on their quality of life (QOL). Although clinicians across the globe acknowledge the importance of regular assessment of fatigue, however it is seldom being assessed and documented in clinical practice in India and therefore remains unidentified parameter among oncology practices in this country, also very few studies in the literature exist reporting on cancer-related fatigue (CRF) among Indian population.

Objective: The main objective of this study was to find out the prevalence and severity of cancer-related fatigue (CRF) and its implication on psychosocial wellbeing among Indian cancer patients.

Methodology: For this study, an exploratory design was adopted using a purposive sampling method, patients (N=206, male 100 and female 106) undergoing chemotherapy (CT) at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Hospital and Research Center, Delhi, India, aged 18-83 years were included. The level of fatigue was assessed using 16-item multidimensional assessment of fatigue (MAF) scale and a semi structured in-depth interview schedule. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

Results: Irrespective of age and education, 81% patients experienced clinically significant fatigue, of which extreme level of fatigue was reported by 29% patients requiring immediate clinical intervention and 52% patients reported moderate level of fatigue, which was also clinically significant. The level of fatigue was reported more in females than males. Top four psychosocial issues reported were apprehension of chemotherapy side effects 23.5%, fear of pain during CT 18.5%, loss of appetite 17.5% and anxiety during chemotherapy 13.5% followed by combination of multiple psycho social issues by 11% and financial and logistic issues by 11%. Among all the patients, 49.5% were aware of their diagnosis, of which 8% were either fully aware or partially aware about the prognosis 23%.

Conclusion: Fatigue remains one of the most important clinical parameters among majority of Indian patients receiving chemotherapy. With females, it is reported more as compared to their counterparts and is neither assessed by clinicians nor reported by majority of the patients. While almost one fourth of the patients report fear of chemotherapy as their pressing psychosocial concern during CT, others report fear of pain, loss of appetite, manifest anxiety symptoms or report financial and logistic issues during CT. Indian patients should be evaluated for treatable conditions that might contribute in achieving promising clinical outcomes. Exercise, educational material and psychotherapeutic interventions should also be developed to prepare and support them during their treatment phase, which will ultimately lead to better preparedness of side effects and their management, better information of the disease, better coping strategies, reduced symptoms and better quality of life.

Biography

Vineet Talwar is presently working as Co-Director, Dept of Medical Oncology at RGCIRC. He has been serving in the Department of Medical Oncology since May 2002. He had completed his DM (Medical Oncology) from prestigious Adyar cancer institute, Chennai in March 2000. He has over 40 publications in his credit in various national and international journals, peer reviewed journals. He is member of the European Society of Medical Oncology (ESMO), American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), Indian Cooperative Oncology Network (ICON), Indian Society Of Oncology (ISO) to name few. He has been awarded three orations from The Association Physician of India, Indian Academy of Clinical Medicine. He was awarded the prestigious 'Chikitsa Ratan Award' by the Delhi State Medical Association for his efforts in field of cancer. He is a Fellow of Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh (FRCP) and also credited as a Fellow of International Medical Sciences Academy (FIMSA).

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