

# Psychosocial Aspect of Penile Cancer: Impact on Health and Social Background, and the Role of Nurses in Counselling and Guidance

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## Abstract

Penile cancer, though rare, presents unique challenges that extend beyond the physical realm, significantly impacting patients' psychosocial well-being. This article explores the psychosocial aspects of penile cancer, including its effects on health and social background, and highlights the crucial role of nurses in providing counselling and guidance. Nurses play a vital role in assessing the psychosocial needs of patients, offering emotional support, providing education and information, addressing body image and sexual functioning concerns, facilitating social support, and ensuring long term follow-up care. By actively engaging in the holistic care of patients with penile cancer, nurses contribute to improving their overall quality of life and well-being.

**Keywords:** Penile Cancer, Ca Penis, Penis Cancer and Psychological Issue.

## INTRODUCTION

Penile cancer is a rare and malignant tumour that develops on the tissues or skin of the penis. It affects men of all ages but is more common in older men. It often starts in skin cells and can work its way inside. It's more common in men who have the human papilloma virus (HPV), are over age 60, smoke, have a weakened immune system<sup>1,2</sup> Symptoms of penile cancer include

changes in skin thickness or color, a rash or small crusty bump on the penis, a lump on the penis, a bad smelling discharge underneath the foreskin, a sore on the penis that may bleed, or swelling at the end of the penis.<sup>2,1</sup> Penile cancer can be treated with medications, cryotherapy, surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy depending on the stage and type of cancer. In this article, we will discuss the psychosocial aspects of penile cancer, its incidence, the impact on health and social background, and the role of nurses in counselling and guidance.

## Incidence

Penile cancer is a rare cancer, accounting for less than 1% of all cancers in men in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The incidence of penile cancer varies worldwide, with the highest rates reported in South America, Africa, and Asia. According to the American Cancer Society, there will be approximately 2,200 new cases of penile cancer in the United States in 2023, and around 440 men will die from it.<sup>4</sup> In India,

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the estimated incidence rate of penile cancer is 0.8 per 100,000 based on the recent population based cancer registry report.<sup>5</sup>

*Predisposing factor of penis cancer:* Penile cancer is a rare type of cancer that affects the penis. Some of the known risk factors for penile cancer include:

- *Lack of circumcision:* Uncircumcised men have a higher risk of penile cancer than those who have been circumcised, possibly because the foreskin can trap bacteria and other substances that can cause cancer.
- *HPV infection:* Human papilloma virus (HPV) infection is a significant risk factor for penile cancer. HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that can cause changes in the cells of the penis that can lead to cancer.
- *Smoking:* Smoking tobacco is a known risk factor for many types of cancer, including penile cancer.
- *Age:* Penile cancer is more common in older men, with most cases occurring in men over 50 years old.
- *Phimosis:* Phimosis is a condition in which the foreskin cannot be retracted from the head of the penis, which can lead to inflammation and infection that may increase the risk of penile cancer.
- *Poor hygiene:* Poor hygiene practices, such as not washing the penis regularly, can increase the risk of infection and inflammation that may lead to penile cancer.
- *HIV infection:* Men who are HIV positive have an increased risk of penile cancer, possibly because of the weakened immune system associated with HIV.

It's important to note that while these factors may increase the risk of penile cancer, not everyone who has one or more of these risk factors will develop the disease. Additionally, some people who develop penile cancer may not have any of these risk factors.

### **Signs and symptoms**

The signs and symptoms of penile cancer may vary from person to person, and some men may not experience any symptoms at all in the early stages. Early detection and treatment of penile cancer can improve the chances of successful treatment and recovery. However, some common signs and symptoms of penile cancer include:

- A lump or thickening on the penis.

- Redness or irritation on the penis.
- Sores or ulcers on the penis that do not heal.
- Bleeding from the penis, especially during intercourse.
- Pain or discomfort on the penis.
- Changes in the skin color or texture on the penis.
- Swelling in the groin area

### **The prognosis for penile cancer:**

The prognosis for penile cancer depends on various factors, including the stage of the cancer, the size and location of the tumour, and whether the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. In general, the earlier the cancer is detected and treated, the better the prognosis.

The American Cancer Society provides the following general survival rates for penile cancer based on the stage of the cancer:

1. For localized cancer (cancer that has not spread beyond the penis), the 5 years relative survival rate is approximately 85%.
2. For regional cancer (cancer that has spread to near by lymph nodes), the 5 years relative survival rate is approximately 59%.
3. For distant cancer (cancer that has spread to distant organs or tissues), the 5 years relative survival rate is approximately 11%.

It's important to note that survival rates are based on large groups of people and do not predict the outcome for any individual person. The outlook for each patient depends on many individual factors, and treatment can greatly affect survival rates.

### **Psychosocial aspect of penile cancer**

The psychosocial aspect of penile cancer refers to the impact of the disease and its treatment on the patient's mental and emotional well-being, quality of life, sexual function, and body image. Penile cancer can cause psychological distress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and sexual dysfunction in patients.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Some of the factors that contribute to the psychosocial burden of penile cancer are:

1. Fear or embarrassment of having a penile lesion and seeking medical help.<sup>9,8</sup>
2. Delayed diagnosis and treatment due to stigma or lack of awareness.
3. Mutilating or disfiguring effects of radical surgery such as partial or total penectomy.<sup>8,9</sup>

4. Loss of sexual identity and intimacy due to changes in penile appearance and function.<sup>8,9</sup>
5. Social isolation and lack of support from partners, family, or friends.<sup>8,9</sup>

Organ preserving treatments such as topical therapy, laser therapy, glans resurfacing, or glansctomy with reconstruction can have a positive impact on the psychosocial outcomes of penile cancer patients by preserving as much of the penis as possible and maintaining satisfactory somatic and sexual health. However, these treatments may not be suitable for all patients depending on the stage and type of cancer. Therefore, it is important to provide psychological counselling and support to patients with penile cancer before, during, and after treatment to help them cope with the emotional challenges and improve their quality of life.

### *Role of Nurses in Counselling and Guidance*

Nurses have multifaceted responsibilities in managing the psychosocial aspects of penile cancer.

#### *Counselling*

Counselling can help men with penile cancer cope with the psychological and social effects of the disease. Nurses can provide emotional support to help men deal with fear, anxiety, and depression. They can also help men develop coping strategies to manage the stress of the disease and its treatment.

#### *Guidance*

Guidance can help men with penile cancer understand the disease, its treatment, and the potential side effects of treatment. Nurses can provide information about the different treatment options available and help men make informed decisions about their care. They can also provide practical guidance on how to manage the physical side effects of treatment, such as fatigue, nausea, and pain.

Following are the essential role in counselling and guidance:

1. *Assessing Psychosocial Needs:* Nurses are responsible for conducting thorough assessments to identify the psychosocial needs of patients with penile cancer. They engage in empathetic and compassionate conversations to understand the emotional, psychological, and social challenges faced by the patients. By developing a comprehensive understanding of the individual's unique circumstances, nurses can tailor their interventions accordingly.

2. *Emotional Support:* Receiving a penile cancer diagnosis can evoke a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, depression, and body image concerns. Nurses provide emotional support by creating a safe and non-judgmental environment for patients to express their feelings. They actively listen, validate emotions, and offer reassurance, helping patients cope with the emotional roller coaster that accompanies the diagnosis and treatment.

3. *Education and Information:* Nurses play a crucial role in educating patients about penile cancer, treatment options, and potential side effects. They ensure that patients and their families have access to accurate and understandable information, empowering them to make informed decisions. By addressing concerns and providing clear explanations, nurses alleviate anxiety and foster a sense of control and involvement in the treatment process.

4. *Body Image and Sexual Functioning:* Penile cancer and its treatments can significantly impact body image and sexual functioning, leading to self-esteem issues and relationship challenges. Nurses provide counselling and support to patients, addressing body image concerns, discussing coping strategies, and facilitating open conversations about sexual health. They may collaborate with other healthcare professionals, such as psychologists or sexual counsellors, to ensure comprehensive care.

5. *Social Support and Community Resources:* Nurses serve as advocates, connecting patients with appropriate support networks and community resources. They provide information about support groups, counselling services, and online communities where patients can find solidarity and share experiences. By facilitating social support, nurses help patients navigate the challenges of penile cancer and reduce feelings of isolation.

6. *Follow-up Care and Survivorship:* Nurses continue to play a pivotal role in the long-term care of penile cancer survivors. They monitor patients' psychosocial well-being, address ongoing concerns, and provide support throughout the survivorship journey. Nurses also educate survivors on self-care practices, including regular check-ups, healthy lifestyle choices, and symptom management.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, penile cancer is a rare but serious disease that can have significant physical, psychological, and social effects on men. The incidence of penile cancer varies widely around the world, and the disease can cause discomfort, pain, and difficulty in urinating. A diagnosis of penile cancer can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression, as well as social isolation and discrimination. The psychosocial aspect of penile cancer demands comprehensive care, and nurses are at the forefront of providing this essential support. By addressing emotional needs, offering education and information, facilitating discussions on body image and sexual functioning, connecting patients with social support, and ensuring long-term follow-up care, nurses contribute significantly to the holistic well-being of individuals affected by penile cancer. Their expertise, compassion, and guidance empower patients to navigate the challenges and improve their overall quality of life.

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