

Quality of life in breast cancer survivors: A questionnaire based assessment at a tertiary care centre

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INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst women in the world and is second only to cancer cervix in India .[1-3]

The National Cancer Institute estimates that 12.7% of women born today will be diagnosed with breast cancer during the course of their lifetime. [3, 4]

This cancer can impact patients psychologically as well as organically both before and after treatment in the form of mastectomy and chemo/radio/hormone therapy. With the recent developments in the fields of surgery, chemotherapy, hormone and targeted therapy the disease free survival in breast cancer has been on the increase in the last decade. These survivors are therefore vulnerable to tremendous physical and psychological impact which can manifest as post mastectomy depression, anxiety, shame, and occasional ideas of suicide. Not only does it drastically affect a woman's life but also takes a toll on family's socio-economic status and fabric.

The issue of 'survivorship' now has become an important issue in breast cancer care that demands the investigation of long-term effects of breast cancer diagnosis and its treatments.[5]

WHO defines Quality of Life (QOL) as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex

way by the person's physical health, psychological state, and personal beliefs.[6]

Nevertheless, the potential psychological, sexual and physical dysfunction caused by both the diagnosis and treatments can have a deleterious impact on the quality of a woman's life. The range of possible treatments may have similar outcomes in terms of response and survival, but can produce very different effects on emotional well-being. Therefore, monitoring quality of life in breast cancer should be a mandatory part of follow-up in clinical trials. There are limited, if any studies conducted in the developing world to assess the QOL issues in breast cancer survivors.

OBJECTIVES

The study would be conducted in collaboration of Institute of Pathology ,Indian Council Of Medical Research VMMC, Safdarjung Hospital New Delhi with an aim to analyze various parameters of quality of life amongst long-term survivors of breast cancer and to identify the specific aspects of quality of life that were affected in these survivors To assess the long term quality of life {QOL} outcomes in disease free breast cancer survivors. To analyse factors responsible for the quality of life related issues like joint family, literacy levels, the type of surgery and the type of adjuvant therapy.

To elicit various psychosocial, existential, rehabilitation concerns amongst disease free breast cancer survivors.

METHODOLOGY

An observational cohort study will be conducted through interviews and questionnaire to assess quality of life on parameters of physical and psychological health, social relationships, and environmental wellbeing amongst women that were diagnosed with invasive breast cancer or ductal carcinoma in situ at least 5 years before June 30, 2011 and were enrolled at Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi.

A sample size of 30 such women will be taken. Quality of life will be measured using World Health Organisation QOL Questionnaire [WHOQLQ-BREF] [7] and EORTC [8] breast cancer supplementary measure (QLQ-BR23).

The data from questionnaire and interviews will be then analysed to score and code for various facets of quality of life (e.g. positive feelings, social support, and financial resources), scores relating to larger domains (e.g. physical, psychological, social relationships) and a score relating to overall quality of life and general health. [9]

The proposed intervention is to create breast cancer support groups and arrange doctor counselling sessions to make the survivors realise that cancer is presentable and curable and to motivate them to join the main stream.

A written consent form will be signed by each patient after explaining various aspects of the study to the patient.

The patient will be assured and all measures will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of the information given by the patient.

Ethical clearance for this study has been applied for.

IMPLICATIONS

Data derived from the study of quality of life will be important for women newly diagnosed with breast cancer, survivors, and

health care providers (including primary care physicians). It can be used to assist the doctor and patient in decision-making about the treatment options. The study will attract the concern of related people on the specific medical and psychosocial needs of breast cancer survivors in order to be able to identify those patients who might benefit from psychosocial interventions and also design appropriate intervention methods. The study is likely to highlight the long term effects of CA breast treatment and would serve as a pilot study to evaluate the effects. This will help us find 'Indian solutions to Indian problem'

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