

Assessment of Long-Term Quality-of-Life (QoL) Outcomes in Disease-Free Breast Cancer Survivors

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Background

Breast cancer is the most prevalent malignancy amongst women in India. Increasing use of multimodality approach has led to an increase in the number of long term breast cancer survivors. To determine the long term effects of breast cancer and to evaluate the complete outcome of cancer treatment, it is essential to assess quality of life (QOL) of the survivors.

Aims & Objectives

To assess long term QOL outcomes in disease free breast cancer survivors.

Material & Methods

It was a follow up study in a cohort of 27 breast cancer survivors. They were managed by the same oncological team at Safdarjung Hospital. A 46 item, subjective questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha coefficient=0.89, Spearman correlation coefficient=0.92) was used to assess QoL in four domains: physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Socio-demographic and clinical data included: age, education, marital status, disease stage, family history, parity and other co-morbid conditions.

Results

The mean age at presentation was 51.5. Physical and

social functioning was excellent. Easy fatigueability and pain severely affected 15% of the survivors. The most frequently mentioned complaint was of painful/swollen arm. More than 30% suffered significant changes in their sleep & appetite pattern. Menopausal symptoms were present in more than half of the survivors. 33% of all, faced difficulty in concentrating and memorizing. Majority of survivors were emotionally stable. 80% were having an active social life. Severe depression was profound in 10% of all the cases. Spiritually & religiously inclined survivors showed better QoL. Almost all the survivors with good QoL had strong support from family & friends. Also, 94 % of physically healthy survivors had socially active life indicating strong co-relation between physical health & social life.

Conclusions

During the follow up, it was found that majority of the survivors were leading a good quality of life. The fact that social support was a predictor of a better QoL indicates that interventions aimed at increasing such support may have additional long-term benefits. The QoL study in breast cancer survivors will also have positive influence on women who are newly diagnosed with breast cancer, on survivors & health care providers.