



SETTING UP OF A COMPLEMENTARY ONCO-PSYCHOLOGY COUNSELLING FOR BREAST CANCER PATIENTS AT A SINGLE SURGEON UNIT IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer incidence in India is on a steady rise, where it is currently the most common female cancer (2). India also brings in the statistics of most breast cancers being detected at a late stage; with approximately 50% presenting as locally advanced at diagnosis. One main contributing factor to the failure of early detection could be the taboo associated with the organ, aggravated by other factors like lack of education and low socio-economic status causing further delays in treatment. The disease also brings with it myriads of psychological issues including cancer diagnosis, fear of recurrence, body image etc. These fears sometimes even result in a lack of compliance to the treatment (1). Here we outline the process for setting up of the onco-psychological counselling clinic for breast cancer patients at a single surgeon multidisciplinary breast health unit and research centre. As a part of our multi-pronged approach towards breast cancer management, we have set-up one of its kind onco-psychology counselling at our centre. This set-up will help us understand the psychological needs of breast cancer patients as well as fulfil our objective to improve the mental health literacy in the patient community. Additionally, the data collected will prove to be a valuable resource to formulate comprehensive follow-up algorithms which include evaluation of the quality of life (QoL) and addressing psychological issues.

METHODOLOGY

The process of data collection was divided into 2 parts, setting up of psycho-oncology clinic and a preparatory step

01

Workflow : Setting up of Onco-psychology clinic



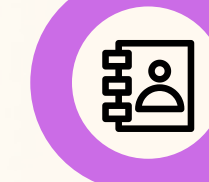
Onboarding of Board-certified psychologist

To help us understand the psychological needs of breast cancer patients as well as fulfil our objective to improve the mental health literacy in the patient community



Patients are given psycho-education

Breast cancer patients with on-going treatment or annual follow up visiting our unit are given pre-counselling and made aware about the Onco-psychology services that are offered



Pre-counselling Survey

Patients are asked to fill the form prior to the session for mental health analysis. Their consent is taken to use their data for project



Data Collection

Collection of anthropometric, clinico-social, and psychological data by the onco-psychologist



Counselling session : In-person or via virtual platform

Patients are briefed about confidentiality before session starts (online/in-person)



Feedback

Session is followed up by taking their feedback and a follow up is done after 15 days

02

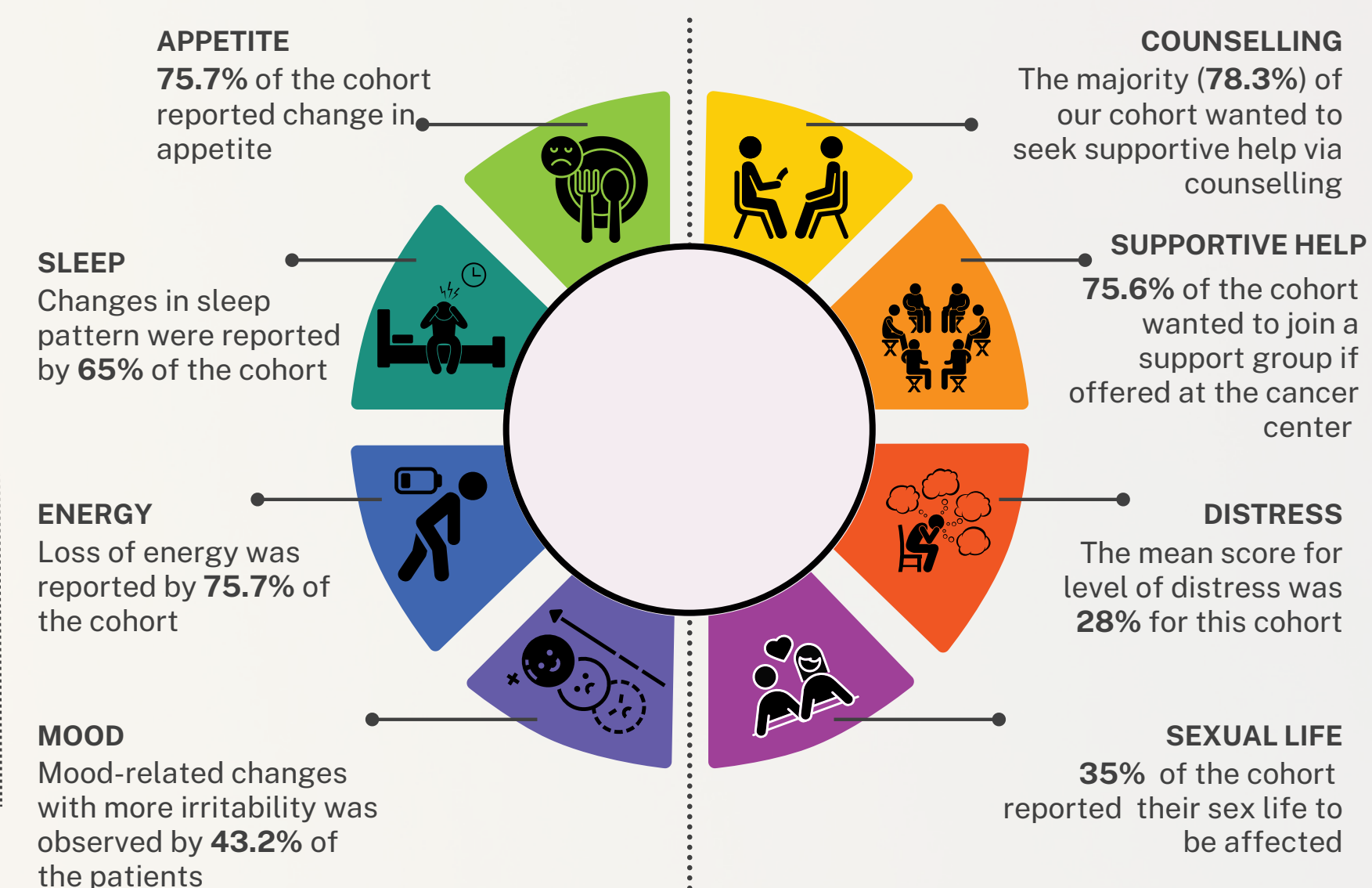
PREPATORY STEP: RESEARCH



Along with the workflow, as part of the preparatory step, we present here preliminary data from the chemotherapy cohort for POST (Psycho-Oncology Screening Tool) Questionnaire. POST has 33 close-ended questions covering various symptoms related to emotional & physical distress, depressive symptoms, social problems etc.

RESULTS

Percentage of symptoms cluster assessed are as follows:



CONCLUSION

Here we outline the supportive care setup focussing on the psychological needs of our breast cancer patients. We envision that in a country where women find it difficult to express themselves, this breast cancer-related onco-psychological counselling set-up will be an essential supportive care tool. Additionally, it will also help understand psychotherapeutic and supportive approaches in order to increase the quality of life and compliance to treatment of breast cancer patients

SIGNIFICANCE

The study was carried out to understand various challenges that patients go through during their treatment and work towards it. Patients were assessed for several factors while in chemotherapy. Majority of the patients displayed concerns when it came to sleep, appetite, fatigue. Some of the patients reported distress. Several patients complained about experiencing irritability. Overall, it can be said that patients face a lot of challenges other than the physical problems while in the treatment. Additional support needs to be provided to them to cope with these issues. Moreover, majority of the patients wanted supportive help in the form of the counselling and support groups. Onco-psychology clinic was set up at our institute to aid the patients with the same. More awareness and supportive care needs to be delivered to the patients in all oncology departments.

FUTURE DIRECTIVES

- Understanding barriers to psychological counselling
- Assessing the patient's mental well-being throughout different stages of the treatment.
- Understand how emotional support affects the patient's attitude towards the treatment.
- Assessing quality of life of the patient during and after the treatment.

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