

Symptom Prevalence Among Cancer Patients Attending the Outpatient Palliative Care Clinic: A Single Institutional Experience

Ayman Allam¹, Zeinab Idris¹, Azza Hassan^{1,2}, Shaikhah Mohsen¹, Hodan Ibrahim¹, Saad Jobran¹, Mostafa Abdelmaksoud³, Amna Idris¹, Salha Bujassoum¹

¹National Center for Cancer Care & Research, Hamad Medical Corporation, Doha, Qatar, ²Weill Cornell Medical College, Doha, Qatar, ³Medical Student in Palliative Care, Hamad Medical Corporation, Doha, Qatar

Introduction

Patients with cancer diagnosis suffer from a variety of distressing symptoms that affect their quality of life. Thus, comprehensive assessment of symptom prevalence especially in patients with advanced cancer who are referred to palliative care outpatient clinics is highly needed to properly address the most prevalent symptoms, leading to improved quality of life of those patients.

Aim

The aim of the present study is to analyze symptom prevalence among patients with advanced cancer referred to palliative care outpatient clinics for the first time

Method

A descriptive cross-sectional study including 300 cancer patients assessed for symptom prevalence upon their first visit to the palliative care outpatient clinic. The ESAS-r tool was used for evaluation of symptom prevalence. Descriptive analysis was carried out, different variables such as age, gender, type of cancer, symptom severity were also studied.

Results

The study consists of a total of 300 patients who visited the palliative care outpatient clinics for the first time between October 2021 to August 2023. The mean age was 54 years. The 4 most common prevalent symptoms were pain (86%), fatigue (75%), anxiety (59%), and anorexia (55%). The most common cancer types were breast cancer (21%), Gastrointestinal cancer (20%), hepatobiliary cancers (14%), and lung cancer (12%). Symptoms prevalence were higher in patients <65 years compared to those ≥65 years, however this difference was not statistically significant. When compared to a cohort of 400 palliative care inpatients, symptoms prevalence were higher for inpatients compared to outpatients.

Table 1. Symptoms' severity

Symptom	Average (SD)
Pain	5.4 (3.1)
Wellbeing	4.5 (2.6)
Fatigue	4.1 (3.1)
Anorexia	2.7 (3.0)
Anxiety	2.5 (2.8)
Depression	1.6 (2.4)
Drowsiness	1.1 (2.0)
Nausea	1.0 (2.1)
Dyspnea	1 (2.0)

Symptom	Outpatient (%) Number of patients (%)	Inpatient Number of patients (%)	P-value
Pain	259 (86%)	334 (84%)	0.303
Fatigue	220 (75%)	392 (98%)	0.001
Drowsiness	98 (33%)	335 (84%)	0.001
Nausea	78 (26%)	244 (61%)	0.001
Anorexia	164 (55%)	364 (91%)	0.001
Dyspnea	72 (24%)	269 (67%)	0.001
Depression	124 (41%)	307 (77%)	0.001
Anxiety	177 (59%)	289 (72%)	0.001
Wellbeing	265 (90%)	393 (98%)	0.001

Table 2. Symptom Prevalence for Outpatients vs Inpatients

Conclusion

The present study showed that pain, fatigue, anxiety and anorexia are the most common prevalent symptoms among cancer patients seen in the palliative care outpatient clinics for the first time. Symptom prevalence for younger patients was higher compared to elderly patients. In comparison to palliative care inpatients, outpatients had lower symptom prevalence.



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