

Awareness about Counseling among the Cancer Patients

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Abstract

Cancer is a group of diseases characterized by an abnormal growth of cells. Cancer is not an infection, but an abnormal growth or lump in any part of the body. It is a non-communicable disease which would occur among approximately four out of every 3,000 population in India, annually. Cancer is a major, acute and chronic health problem affecting patients and their families. Provision of counseling by the social workers in the hospital to the persons diagnosed with cancer is more useful to cope up with the stress and other difficult situations. The study deals with the awareness of counseling services among cancer patients. Around 40 patients who were in the inpatient ward, affected by cancer were interviewed. The results found that majority of the patients were aware of counseling services and it is very much effective in bringing their stress level down.

Keywords: Cancer, Non-communicable, Social workers, Stress, Inpatient

Introduction

Cancer is one of the most frightening words in English language, conjuring up images of pain, lingering death, despite current advances in medical technology. The impact of cancer on the mental health of the patients' family has become a focus of research and practice among social workers and other mental health professionals (Hattem, 1986). Cancer is not an infection, but an abnormal growth or lump in any part of the body. Common types are cancer of the womb or ovaries, cancer of the skin, breast cancer, and any hard, painless slowly growing lump in any part of the body may be cancer. Cancer is often dangerous and may need surgery (Bhattacharya, 2008).

Cancer may be regarded as a group of diseases characterized by an abnormal growth of cells (Park, 2005). If cells keep dividing, when new cells are not needed, a

mass of tissue forms. This mass of extra tissue, called a “growth” or “tumor”, can be benign (non-cancerous tumour) or malignant (cancerous tumor) (Velayudhan & Gayatri Devi, 2012).

Cancer is a global health problem and the greatest human malady. Approximately four out of every 3, 000 population in India are affected by it annually. In eastern India, the estimated cancer incidence is about 3, 00, 000. Due to poor health awareness and inadequate health care system, most of the cases are diagnosed at a late stage with median survival period of 4-5 years. Thus, at any given point of time there are 12-15 lakh cancer patients in eastern India, most of them in far advanced and terminally ill stage (Velayudhan & Gayatri Devi, 2012).

Cancer is a major acute and chronic health problem affecting patients and their families; the number of social workers dealing with cancer is undoubtedly significant. Although oncology social work as a speciality area of practice is usually carried out in the hospital. Social workers with special knowledge of cancer are beginning to practice in many different kinds of settings. In addition, social workers with this expertise also find themselves consulting with other social workers in other settings (Stonberg, 1981).

Meaning of Counseling

To counsel means ‘to advise, to recommend, to advocate, to exhort, to suggest, to urge’ (Oxford Dictionary 1996:131). However, counseling as a concept, as observed by Miller and Bor (1991), has many interpretations. Whatever its goals, counseling is directed towards assisting people to take decisions, to effect a change, to prevent problems or crises or to manage them when they arise. Hopson (1981) thus, from a problem-solving perspective, saw counseling as helping people to explore problems and clarify conflicting issues, and to discover alternative ways of dealing with the problems by taking appropriate decisions and action.

Evidence that counseling helps people with cancer

There is a lot of evidence that counseling can help the patients to cope better with many difficulties that they face, during and after diagnosis and treatment. It can help to reduce the stress and anxiety that the patients face and improve the quality of life.

We know from research that counseling can help people to overcome the depression and anxiety that cancer can cause. There is also evidence that certain methods of counseling can help people deal with phobias about availing cancer treatments. The phobias include issues like fear of having injections or being confined to a small space during an MRI scan, radio therapy, Chemo therapy etc.

Although some doctors and nurses may provide their patients with emotional and psychological support, many don’t feel comfortable doing this. Some health care professionals may not always feel to extend support or they may not have enough time to do it. Their main focus is on treating and curing cancer. But many people are also worried about how they can cope with their illness and how it will disrupt their everyday life. Because of this, some cancer units now have a counselor or

psychotherapist as part of their team.

A study published in the September 2004 issues of the Journal of Clinical Oncology found that regular counseling sessions helped women with stage II or III breast cancer feel more relaxed. There were 227 women on the trial. This was a randomized trial. The women were put into two groups. One group had a simple psychological assessment, with no counseling sessions. The other group had small group counseling sessions once a week for four months.

By carrying out regular blood tests, the researchers also found that the women in the counseling group had a boost in the activity of their immune system. The numbers of particular white blood cells called T cells got increased. T cells are part of the immune system. Immune system helps to protect the body against infection and illness. It can play an important role in people with cancer because 'Cancer can weaken the immune system, Cancer treatment can weaken the immune system and the immune system may help to fight cancer'.

Methodology

The aim is to study the level of awareness about counseling among cancer patients.

Objectives

- To know the profile of the cancer patients
- To study the awareness level of counseling among cancer patients
- To explore the effectiveness of counseling delivery system in the hospital

UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING

Bharath cancer hospital, Mysore started its work during 1989 and catering to the needs of all types of cancer patients. For the study the data was collected from first week of January 2013 to last week of March 2013. The number of available patients in the inpatient ward was approximately 75 patients from January 2013 to March 2013. Convenient sampling has been used to select 40 respondents and the researcher interviewed who were willing to respond for the study. The researcher has used a structured interview schedule to collect pertinent primary data from the respondents. Researcher interviewed patient directly wherever it was convenient and also interviewed one of their relative/family member wherever it was not possible to speak to the respondents directly.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher has adopted exploratory research design for the study. It intends to study the cancer patients' awareness about counseling.

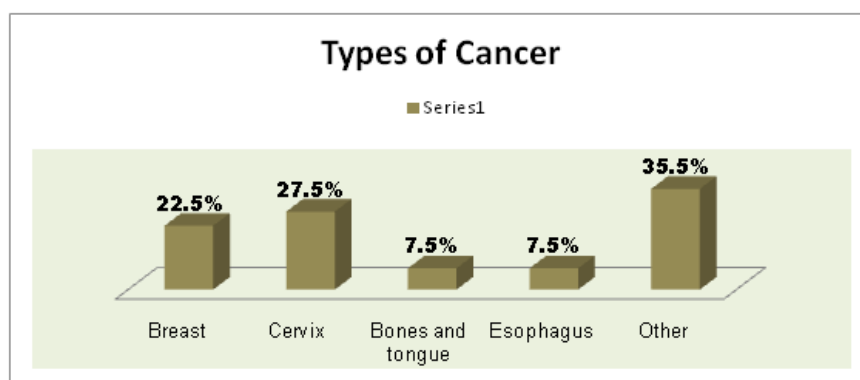
Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 Socio-demographic details of the respondents

Socio-demographic details		N=40 (Percentage)
Age group	35yrs to 45yrs	06 (15)
	46yrs to 55yrs	19 (48)
	56yrs to 65yrs	09 (22)
	66yrs to 75yrs	05 (13)
	76yrs to 85yrs	01 (2)
Gender of the respondents	Male	15 (38)
	Female	25 (62)
Marital Status	Married	37 (93)
	Unmarried	03 (07)
Educational status	Literate	16 (40)
	Illiterate	24 (60)

The above table shows the age of the respondents. From the table it is seen that majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 46 yrs to 55 years i.e., 48percent (19). Whereas 22 percent of the respondents fall between the age group of 56yrs to 65yrs are undergoing treatment for Cancer. 15percent and 13percent of the respondents are of the age group of 35 to 46 years, and 66 to 75 years respectively. Only 2percent of the cancer patients were belong to the age group of 76 to 85 years undergoing treatment for cancer.

The second row in the table shows the gender of respondents. Majority of the population is female respondents i.e., 62 percent (25) suffering from cancer and undergoing treatment. On the other hand a small portion of male population is also undergoing treatment for cancer that is 38 percent (15). The third row reveals that the marital status of the cancer patients. 93 percent (37) are married. Only around seven percent (3) respondents are unmarried. The fourth row in the table depicts the educational status of the respondents. 60 percent (24) respondents are illiterate, whereas 40percent (16) respondents are literate patients.



Graph 1: Types of cancer

The above graph represents the different types of cancer is being contracted by the patients. Nearly 27.5 percent (11) respondents are suffering from cancer of cervix, whereas 22.5 percent (9) of them undergoing treatment for breast cancer. An equal number of respondents i.e., 7.5 percent (3) of patients are suffering from bones and tongue cancer and esophagus cancer respectively. Around 35.5percent (14) respondents are suffering from other types of cancers that is lung cancer, oral cancer etc., .

Table 2: Awareness about counseling services

Sl No.	Overall opinion on counseling services by the respondents	N = 40 (Percentage)	
1	Aware of counseling services	Yes	32 (80)
		No	08 (20)
2	Mental disturbance after diagnosis	Yes	38 (95)
		No	2 (5)
3	Participation in the process of counseling	Yes	40 (100)
4	Got basic knowledge about cancer during counseling	Yes	40 (100)
5	understood the causes for cancer during counseling session	Yes	34 (85)
		No	6 (15)
6	Resolution of doubts through counseling	Yes	38(95)
		No	2 (5)
7	Guiding others to avail counseling services	Yes	40 (100)
8	Clearance of all doubts by counselor	Yes	37 (92.5)
		No	3 (7.5)
9	Got knowledge about treatment for cancer during counseling	Yes	38 (95)
		No	2 (5)
10	Counseling is useful for cancer patients	Yes	40 (100)

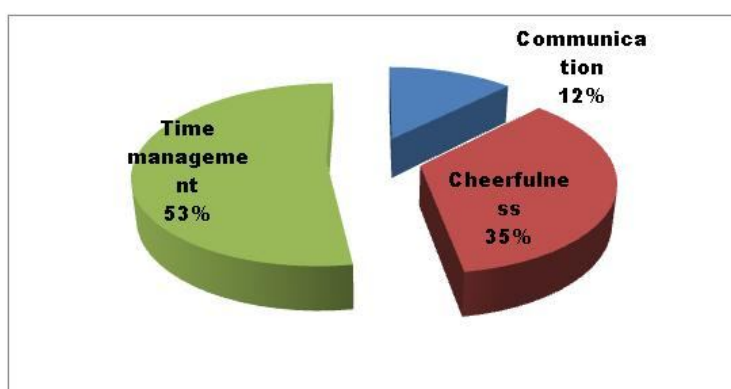
The above table depicts the overall response with regard to awareness about counseling services among cancer patients. Nearly 80 percent (32) respondents are aware of counseling services before going for the treatment wherein 20 percent (8) not aware of counseling services. The counseling service takes place after having preliminary opinion given by the expert doctor with regard to cancer. The second row represents the emotionally disturbed behavior of the respondents. Around 95 percent (38) respondents are reported to be disturbed when they got to know that they are affected by cancer.

The third row presents the participation of cancer patients in the process of counseling. All the respondents (100%) opined that they have participated in the process of counseling and got to know the knowledge with regard to cancer and its treatment process. In the fourth row it is shown that, all the respondents (100%) opined that they got the basic knowledge with regard to cancer during counseling. Nearly 85 percent (34) respondents understood the causes of cancer whereas 15 percent (6) have not understood clearly.

In the sixth row it is shown that through counseling around 95 percent (38) respondents cleared their doubts with regard to cancer. From the seventh row it is

understood that all of the respondents (100%) opined that counseling is required for all other patients who are tested preliminarily and diagnosed with cancer, hence they will guide others to avail counseling services. Nearly 92.5 percent (37) respondents discussed the doubts with the counselor and cleared those during counseling which is shown in eighth row.

During the process of counseling the counselor not only spoke about the causes of cancer but also the treatment and its cost and other details to the patients elaborately. It is shown that nearly 95 percent (38) respondents understood the knowledge about treatment for cancer during counseling. The last row represents that all the respondents (100%) have reported that counseling services are absolutely useful for the cancer patients to enlighten them about the disease.



Graph 2 : Skills and qualities of an effective counselor.

The above graph speaks about the necessary skills and qualities required for an effective counselor. 53 percent (21) respondents opined that a counselor should be a master in time management where in 35 percent (14) respondents opined of counselors should have cheerfulness, whereas 12 percent (5) respondents opined that the counselors must have effective communication ability.

Findings

- Majority of the respondents belongs to the age group of 46 to 55 years i.e., 47.5percent (19).
- Majority of the respondents are female patients i.e., 62.5percent (25) who are suffering from cancer and undergoing treatment.
- 92.5percent (37) respondents are married
- As many as 60 percent (24) respondents are illiterate
- Majority of the respondents 35.5percent (14) are suffering from other types of cancer i.e., lung cancer, oral cancer etc.,
- Nearly 80 percent of respondents are aware of counseling services before going for the treatment.

- As many as 95 percent of respondents are reported to have been disturbed when they got to know that they are affected by cancer
- All the respondents (100%) opined that they have actively participated in the process of counseling and got to know the knowledge with regard to cancer and its treatment.
- All the respondents (100%) opined that they got the basic knowledge with regard to cancer during counseling.
- As many as 85 percent respondents understood the causes of cancer during counseling session.
- Through counseling nearly 95 percent respondents cleared their doubts with regard to cancer.
- All of the respondents (100%) opined that counseling is required for all other patients who are preliminarily tested and diagnosed with cancer; hence they guide others to go for counseling.
- As many as 95 percent respondents have got the knowledge with regard to the treatment to cancer during counseling.
- All the respondents (100%) are reported that counseling services are absolutely useful for the cancer patients to make them aware of the disease

Suggestion:

- In present study most of patients are female, so research can be extended to male patients.
- Most of the cancer patients suffering from Cervix, hence hygiene awareness programs to be provided for the society.
- Promotion of public awareness to prevent various types of cancer.
- Future studies can also be taken up on the effectiveness of psychotherapy on cancer patients.
- Develop assessment center to coordinate community resources and improve services to cancer patients and their families.

Conclusion

Cancer is one of the non-communicable diseases which can be cured when it is diagnosed during the preliminary stage. Immediately after the diagnosis of cancer, the patients should be referred to a counselor for counseling. During the counseling sessions, counselor will enable the clients to understand the disease and motivate them to seek further treatment. Counseling is one of the noble professions where it tries to bring down stress and enable the clients to cope with the problem among cancer patients. In fact, counseling is a multipurpose tool and a technique through which a counselor can enhance the quality of life of people.

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