Barriers and Trends in Cancer Pain Management in Qatar: A Randomized Cohort Prospective Study

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Background

Up to 70% of cancer patients experience pain during their course of illness.[1] Studies showed that 40-50% of patients with cancer pain receive insufficient analgesia due to different factors. Physicians are facing different challenges to accurately assess pain which might affect drug selection and pain control.[2,3,4]

In the National Center for Cancer Care & Research (NCCCR), treating physicians may prescribe analgesics to their patients or refer them to the Pain Management Service (PMS) based on their evaluation or as requested by patients.

Objectives

This study was conducted to assess the existing PMS at NCCCR from patients' perspective. It explored the factors which might lead to under-treatment of cancer pain in Qatar. In addition, it focused on cancer patients' pain management satisfaction and PMS awareness.

Methods

In this study, we evaluated patients' pain management perceptions via a validated written -Arabic & English- questionnaire (SF-MPQ-2). [5,6] A structured interview by Outpatient Pharmacists was conducted at a single point of time to assess if patients are aware of the PMS or not, if they are receiving pain medications or not, if they are experiencing any pain regardless on pain medications or not, their pain severity, and their level of satisfaction with their treatment.

A sample of patients was randomly selected from the total cancer population visiting NCCCR Pharmacy over a specific period of time. Patients who agreed to participate were consented and interviewed.

Results

A total of 400 patients agreed to participate; their median age was 50 and male to female ratio was 3:7. Results showed that 61% (245/400) of participants were not aware of the existence of PMS. Only 20% (78/400) were aware and followed by PMS, with a satisfaction rate of 76% (59/78). Although 69% (276/400) of patients were on pain medications, more than 30% (85/276) of them were not satisfied with their treatment. From the 191 (69%) satisfied patients, 57% rated their pain as 4-10 at the time of interview. From the 124 (31%) patients that were not on pain medications, 77% did not know about the PMS and 44% had 4-10 pain severity. More details are in Table 1 and Figures 1–5.

Figure 1: Patients by diagnosis

Figure 2: Patients pain scale in relation to satisfaction

Figure 3: Satisfaction and pain clinic awareness for patients on pain medications

Figure 4: Pain clinic awareness for patients not on pain medications

Figure 5: patients' satisfaction with pain clinic

Table 1: Are you satisfied with your current pain medications?

Pain scale	Not on pain medication	NO	YES	Grand Total	95% CI
0	50 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	57 (14.3%)	107 (26.8%)	22.6% to 1.3%
1	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	4 (1%)	5 (1.3%)	0.45% to 3%
2	10 (2.5%)	1 (0.3%)	6 (1.5%)	17 (4.3%)	2.6% to 6.8%
3	8 (2%)	4 (1%)	15 (3.8%)	27 (6.8%)	4.7% to 9.7%
4	14 (3.5%)	9 (2.3%)	21 (5.3%)	44 (11%)	8.3% to 14.5%
5	12 (3%)	10 (2.5%)	20 (5%)	42 (10.5%)	7.8% to 13.9%
6	10 (2.5%)	10 (2.5%)	18 (4.5%)	38 (9.5%)	7% to 12.8%
7	8 (2%)	21 (5.3%)	27 (6.8%)	56 (14%)	10.9% to 7.8%
8	6 (1.5%)	18 (4.5%)	14 (3.5%)	38 (9.5%)	7% to 12.8%
9	3 (0.8%)	9 (2.3%)	5 (1.3%)	17 (4.3%)	2.6% to 6.8%
10	2 (0.5%)	3 (0.8%)	4 (1%)	9 (2.3%)	1.1% to 4.3%
Grand Total	124 (31%)	85 (21.3%)	191 (47.8%)	400 (100%)	

Conclusion

Our findings showed that factors leading to under-treating of cancer pain in Qatar might be; unawareness of the PMS existence, pain treatment by non-specialized physicians, and patients' reluctance to express their pain. Thus, raising patient awareness and standardizing the referral criteria can improve pain control and quality of life among cancer patients with pain.

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