

Delay in Seeking Referral Treatment among Breast Cancer Patients at Ocean Road Cancer Institute and Muhimbili National Hospitals Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

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Objective

To explore factors associated with delay in seeking referral for cancer treatment among breast cancer patients

Introduction

In Tanzania, cancer is recognized as a serious health care problem (ORCI, 2008) and is one of the major causes of mortality, morbidity, and disease burden. Tanzania with a population of 42.5 million people, it was estimated that 21,000 new cancer cases occur each year (Ferlay et al., 2008), out of this only 10% of these new cases manage to get proper care and treatment (MEWATA, 2008). Breast cancer is an issue of public health concern in Tanzania (MEWATA, 2008). It ranks third after cancer of the cervix and kaposi sarcoma and it accounts 9.3% of all cancers seen at Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI). The Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) and Muhimbili National Hospital (MNH) are the health facilities which receive cancer patients from all over Tanzania. From the Newly diagnosed cancer, Less than 10% of patients are able to go for treatment at ORCI, and of this population 80% arrive when the cancer is too far advanced to treat effectively (Walker, 2007). Hence this paper focuses on factors which contributing to the delay of breast cancer patients to seek treatment at the tertiary hospitals after being diagnosed.

Methods

This was analytical cross-sectional study design involved either in-patient or out-patient services at the ORCI and MNH. The convenient sampling technique was used, Informed consent for participation in the study for breast cancer patients was sought verbally or written. Data were analyzed using STATA.

Results

This study recruited 142 study participants 24 from MNH and 118 from ORCI. Their mean age was 53 years and 62% were married, 21% employed. About 16% of the study participants were literate, 29% having completed at least a primary education. Then those who delayed in seeking treatment for more than three months were asked for the reasons for their delay for seeking health care after being diagnosed with breast cancer. Among them, 34% said cost of treatment, 15% said distance to ORCI/MNH, 37% said they were receiving treatment at the traditional healers and 14% said misinformation about treatment offered at ORCI/MNH. About 69% and 46% of breast cancer patients with the age range of 50 – 69 reported at the tertiary hospitals when the cancer is at stage I and II respectively. These findings implies that patient spend more time seeking treatment at the traditional healers and resulted into presentation at the tertiary hospitals when cancer is at advanced stage and hence difficult to cure.

Conclusions

This study provides very vital information which will assist the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to design strategies that will enable breast cancer patients to present early for treatment after being diagnosed.

Main Reasons for Patient Delay Seeking Treatment at Ocean Road Cancer Institute and Muhimbili National Hospital

Main Reasons for Patient Delay Seeking Treatment at Ocean Road Cancer Institute and Muhimbili National Hospital	frequency	%
Cost	20	34
Distance	9	15
Receiving treatment at the traditional healer	22	37
Misinformation about treatment offered at ORCI and MNH	8	14
Total	59	100

Keywords

Breast Cancer; Delay in seeking treatment; cancer stages

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