Assessment of Pain Control among Adult Cancer Patients in the Gaza-Strip Hospitals: A Cross-sectional Study

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Abstract

Background:
Poor control of cancer pain is a major public health problem worldwide. Many potential barriers can lead to sub-optimal treatment of cancer pain. One of them is the inadequate measurement and assessment of this pain. This study aims to assess the level of pain control among hospitalized adult cancer patients in the Gaza-Strip.

Methods:
This was a cross-sectional study conducted from December 2017 to June 2018 in the Gaza-Strip, Palestine. A translated-into-Arabic version of the validated Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) questionnaire was used for data collection. It consisted of three sections; the first described the sociodemographic characteristics. The second section evaluated the severity of cancer pain while the third assessed its interference with daily activities. A 10-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the magnitude of cancer pain as well as its impact on patient lifestyle. Inclusion criteria were: being an adult (aged>12 years), having cancer, being admitted to either of study hospitals (Al-Rantisi Hospital or European Gaza Hospital), and having no mental illness or a disorder affecting pain sensation. Convenience sampling was used to recruit eligible cancer patients for face-to-face interviews to complete the Arabic BPI. The primary outcome was the level of pain control among adult cancer inpatients. Ethical approval was obtained from the Palestinian Ministry of Health and informed consent was taken from the patient. Data analysis was done using SPSS (version 22).

Findings:
In total, 97 patients were included. The median age was 49.0 years (SD=15.7, IQR=25.5), 52 (53.6%) were females and 79 (81.4%) were married. The majority (n=74, 76.3%) had an educational level of high-school or lower and 55 (56.7%) were unemployed. Among all patients, 81 (83.5%) had cancer pain as one of the presenting symptoms when they were first diagnosed and 87 (89.7%) reported feeling pain due to their cancer (mean severity= 4.8 ± 3.2 of 10 total score) at the time of interview. About 70.0% (n=68) received painkillers (analgesics) within the last week, but 54 (55.7%) were still feeling that they need to use these analgesics daily.

From those who were taking analgesics (n=73), 11 (15.1%) reported a complete relief of pain after using them. In contrast, 47 (64.4%) had a recurrent pain in less than 12 hours, and 31 (42.5%) reported that they need more potent medications to control their pain, whereas 22 (30.1) wanted more frequent doses. The experienced cancer pain negatively influenced various aspects of patient lifestyle with normal work being the most affected by 81.5% followed by general activity with 80.7%.

Interpretation:
Although most patients were taking analgesics, a large proportion was still reporting the need for more potent painkillers or doses that are more frequent. In addition, there was a significant impact of pain on the patient lifestyle. These findings reflect a poor control of the patients' cancer pain. Thus, there is an urgent need to address the reasons for this to alleviate their suffering and to improve their quality of life.

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Patient consent

Obtained.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have nothing to disclose.