

Anxiety and depression in patients with haematological neoplasms in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Background: It is not uncommon that anxiety and depression occur in patients with cancers, and past researches have shown that the quality of life of patients is negatively affected. This study aims to determine the prevalence of anxiety and depression of patients with haematological cancers in Malaysia and to investigate the possible association of these psychological symptoms with their quality of life.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study where patients with haematological cancers attending two major hospitals were recruited. Anxiety and depression symptoms were assessed using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale (HADS). Quality of life (QoL) of these patients was measured using the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer quality of life questionnaire (EORTC QLQ C30). An overall summary QoL score in combination with financial difficulty score and global health score were used for analysis.

Results: A total of 319 patients were recruited. Thirty-three percent of patients had anxiety symptoms, 23.5% had depression symptoms. In summary the overall score of QoL is significantly lower in patients with higher scores for depression and anxiety, ($p < 0.05$). Patients who exhibit anxiety symptoms were more frequently female, still undergoing treatment whereas patients who had higher depression scores were older and had acute leukemias or myeloproliferative neoplasms. Patients who have depression are significantly associated with a higher financial difficulty score, $p < 0.05$.

Conclusion: The poor quality of life in patients who have anxiety and depression should raise awareness amongst the health professions treating them so that additional support can be provided.

KEY WORDS:

Anxiety, depression, quality of life, haematological cancers

INTRODUCTION

Haematological cancers account for approximately 6.5% of the total cancers diagnosed in the world.¹ In Malaysia,

haematological cancers accounts for 9.6% of the total cancers.² Patients with haematological cancers were reported as having the highest distress at the time of diagnosis as compared to other cancer patients.^{3,4} Haematological cancers are distinct diseases which in many ways different from solid tumours, not only in their presentation but also management.

It is well established that patients who had been diagnosed of cancers, whether solid cancer or haematological cancer exhibit anxiety and depression symptoms.^{4,7} According to a study by Linden et al., the prevalence rates of anxiety and depression are also different for various types of cancers. Patients with lung, gynaecological and haematological cancers were reported to have the highest level of emotion distress at time of diagnosis.⁴ A recent study by Clinton-McHarg et al., indicated that 27% of patients with haematological cancers reported anxiety and 17% reported significant depression.⁵ There are only few studies that has looked into the prevalence of anxiety and depression in patients with haematological cancers, especially in South East Asian countries. Most of the studies focused mainly on patients with solid tumours and yet, a recent paper noted that South Asian patients reported higher rates of depressive symptoms and experienced more physical symptoms compared to Caucasian patients.⁸⁻¹⁰

Presence of anxiety and depression symptoms has been proven to affect one's quality of life (QoL).¹¹⁻¹³ In patients with haematological cancers, QoL has also been consistently shown to be worse.¹³⁻¹⁵ Identifying and screening for this emotion distress is vital especially it had been demonstrated that cognitive-behavioural therapy will not only reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, it can also result in improvement of QoL of patients.¹⁶

Since there is a dearth of information on the psychological stress and QoL amongst haematological cancer patients in the South East Asian region, this study aims to determine the prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms in a larger population and to identify the possible relevant clinical factors and patients' demographics which may be associated with the risk of anxiety and/or depression. In addition, the effects of anxiety and depression symptoms on the QoL of these patients were also examined.

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Clinical Implications

In conclusion, this study is one of the few studies which specifically explored the psychological distress of haematological cancer patients in the South East Asian regions. The results revealed that there is a high prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms amongst the haematological cancer patients and their QoL is adversely affected. Our results should encourage health care professionals to be more cognizant of the psychological symptoms that patients have, so that appropriate therapy and counselling can be provided in a timely manner. In addition, financial burden which contribute further to the psychological stress in patients should not be undermined and early interventions and support by relevant authorities and staff may help to alleviate some of these problems.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interests.

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