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Determining the Unmet Needs Among Breast Cancer Survivors: An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Study

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OBJECTIVE

This study was conducted to characterize the unmet supportive care and factors contributing to the needs among breast cancer survivors in Kuching, Sarawak.

METHODS

It was an exploratory sequential mixed methods study.

RESULTS

In the qualitative exploration phase, nine respondents comprising survivors, healthcare providers, and informal caregivers were interviewed. The need for an additional category of “practical, social, and spiritual support,” was indicated in the interviews, which was incorporated into the Short Form 34-item Supportive Care Needs Survey (SCNS-SF34). In the quantitative phase, a total of 259 survivors participated. Regression analysis revealed that shorter duration of survival and younger age were significant factors contributing to greater overall unmet needs. Other significant contributing factors were late stage (Stages III and IV) cancer, undergoing active treatment, being employed, Malays and Sarawak indigenous groups, high education level, and age at diagnosis of <50 years. Marriage was associated with higher needs in the sexuality domain but with lower needs in the physical and daily living domain.

CONCLUSION

The sociodemographic and medical characteristics of survivors were significant factors for the unmet needs. It is crucial to deliver targeted and systematic supportive care according to these factors for improving the quality of life and well-being of breast cancer survivors.

Keywords: Breast cancer survivors; mixed methods study; unmet needs.

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Introduction

A diagnosis of cancer alters a patient’s perspective on health and eventually life [1] as well as disrupts psychological functioning.[2] For the individual, life after cancer diagnosis is filled with the struggle to find a meaning in life, regain control in activities of daily living, and adjust to the reorientation of values and goals in life.[3] It is a life changing experience that is unique to the individual survivor but also carries a universal similarity, with uncertainties and consequences.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the term “quality of life” is often considered when one analyzes the issue of cancer survival. It is no exception that breast cancer survivors experience multiple challenges across various domains, and these challenges are perceived as needs. To address these issues, researchers have developed and proposed the use of an assessment for the needs, which has the advantage of focusing on the issues of both quality of life and care and identifying the area of need and its magnitude.[4] Furthermore, a recent study has revealed that breast cancer survivors