

PP 28

Physical experiences of patients with colorectal cancer at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka

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Background: Globally, Colorectal Cancer (CRC) is the third and the second leading cancer among men and women, respectively. Patients with CRC encounter adverse physical experiences due to the disease condition and the treatment process.

Objective: To explore the physical experiences of patients with CRC at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka.

Methods & Materials: Eighteen patients with CRC were purposefully recruited for this qualitative descriptive study during March to May 2019 based on data saturation. All patients were in the first two years of their disease and ranged in age from 35-55 years. Patients who had undergone surgery due to the CRC and experienced three cycles of chemotherapy were included. Interviews were conducted with semi-structured interviewer guide to collect data and data were analyzed using the thematic analysis. Ethical approval was taken from the Ethical Review Committee of Colombo South Teaching Hospital, Sri Lanka.

Results: Three major themes emerged from the findings such as the feeling of discomfort, losing physical control, and disturbance to life routines. Pain that related to the disease condition (abdominal pain, diarrhoea or constipation, rectal bleeding), pain during the treatment implementation process (frequent IV cannulation and chemotherapy treatments), pain due to the complications of treatments (oral ulcers, nausea vomiting and loss of appetite) and physical exertion and fatigue on the journey between home and hospital were causes of discomfort. Fatigue and numbness of extremities, visual disturbances and sleep pattern disturbances triggered to feel loss of physical control. Frequent filling and leakage of the colostomy bag and sexual disturbances were identified as disturbances to life routines.

Conclusion: Patients suffer from many physical ailments due to CRC and its treatments, and their lifestyle is adversely affected. These findings highlight the importance of educating patients on the strategies to minimize negative physical experiences through managing different aspects of pain and other symptoms.