The Need for Holistic Cancer Care Framework: Breast Cancer Care as an Example

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Breast cancer (BC) is the most common cancer in females in the Sultanate of Oman, with significant physical and psychological burden. By studying two cohorts of patients diagnosed over a twelve year period between 1996 and 2008, we have previously demonstrated that BC in Oman presents in advanced stages in younger patients with aggressive biological characteristics such as triple negative phenotype and poor tumor differentiation. The advanced stage at presentation is the most important prognostic factor and impacts negatively on outcome in terms of overall survival.

It has been disappointing to observe that there has been no change in advanced stage presentation with stages III and IV forming 51% and 59% in the two periods studied, 1996-2002 and 2003-2008, respectively. However, we have observed an improvement in 5 years survival between the two cohorts with improvement from 64% to 78% between the two periods of study, respectively.

These findings strongly suggest that the improvement in survival has been due to optimization of surgical and medical management with the introduction of various new chemotherapeutic regimens and targeted therapy. However, treatment of advanced breast cancer is costly and represents a significant financial burden. It is estimated that the cost for a breast cancer patient ranged between $20,000 and $100,000 in the USA in 2009, with increasing cost for patients presenting in advanced stages of BC. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the failure to detect BC at early stages impacts negatively on patient survival in Oman, with significant physical and psychological morbidity and increased financial expenditure at the national level.

In conclusion, there is urgent need to review our current approach to cancer care in Oman and breast cancer care in particular. The adoption of cancer care continuum with provision of all types of care through coordinated efforts of various organizational hierarchies and implementation of interventional strategies is required. It is time to move forward towards a new holistic cancer care approach to enhance quality, efficiency, accountability, and patient outcome.
References


