



The persistence of nutrition impact symptoms in cancer survivors' post-treatment

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Nutrition impact symptoms (NIS) are defined as those likely to impact nutritional status and negatively increase the risk of malnutrition⁽¹⁾. Cancer survivors undergoing cancer treatment have reported experiencing a significant burden of NIS⁽²⁾, and these are associated with an increased risk of malnutrition and impaired quality of life^(1, 3). There is a deficit in research on the persistence of NIS post-treatment for cancer survivors. Thus, this research aimed to explore whether any NIS persisted post-treatment in cancer survivors across Ireland. Cancer survivors aged 18+ years living across Ireland, who were not palliative and had completed active cancer treatment at least six months previous, were recruited to complete an online survey assessing nutrition practices. It was circulated by cancer support networks and on social media. A question in this quantitative study focused on the NIS of cancer survivors, which will be reported on. SPSS for MAC, version 26 (IBM Corp., 2019, Armonk, NY, USA), was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics are presented. Categorical data were tested using X2 tests with Bonferroni adjustments for multiple comparisons. The cohort (n = 170) was predominantly female (85.9%) and had breast cancer (64.7%). The mean age for the cohort was 51.5 ± 10.9 years. The average time since treatment ceased was 6.4 ± 4.5 years. Of the cohort 31.2% (n = 53) had completed treatment within the previous two years, 28.8% (n = 49) were 3–5 years post-treatment and 40% (n = 68) were > five years post-treatment. Recent weight gain (last six months) was reported by 33.7% of the cohort (n = 57), with weight fluctuations being experienced by an additional 22.9% (n = 39).

Cancer-related fatigue was the most burdensome symptom, still experienced by 62.4% (n = 106) of respondents in the previous six months and this was more frequent for those < 5 years post-treatment (68.7% vs 31.3%, p < 0.001). Pain was reported by 36.1% of the cohort; females reported pain more than males (32.2% vs 8.3%, p < 0.01). Further, NIS still experienced in the previous six months reported by respondents were constipation (33%), dry mouth (26%) and diarrhoea (16.6%). It is evident how particular NIS are experienced by cancer survivor's years post-treatment, highlighting the importance of early identification and management of NIS with adequate follow-up to provide optimal care for cancer survivors.

References

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