

Morbidity and quality of life among head and neck cancer patients treated with radical radiotherapy

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Date: 2009-04

Abstract:

OBJECTIVES: To determine the relative frequency of acute radiation morbidity and their perceived effect on quality of life among head and neck cancer patients treated with radical radiotherapy. **DESIGN:** A cross-sectional study. **SETTING:** Kenyatta National Hospital, Nairobi. **SUBJECTS:** Thirty eight patients comprising 28 males and 10 females with ages ranging between 21 and 69 years were evaluated. **RESULTS:** Most of the tumours occurred in the nasopharynx (38.6%). The rest of the tumours were equally divided between the oral cavity and larynx (31.6%). All tumours except two were carcinomas. The two exceptions were a glomus tumour and a malignant melanoma. The patients had received doses of radiotherapy ranging between 58.5 Grey and 75.5 Grey. Of the 38 patients, 22 (53%) completed their treatment in the prescribed time while 16 (47%) had treatment interruption on account of radiation morbidity. The cumulative radiation done at the time of interruption ranged between 20 and 46 Grey. The most frequent symptom was dryness of the mouth while the most troublesome symptom was difficulty in tasting foods. The quality of life (QOL) did not vary by age, gender or tumour site. Patients who had treatment interruption had a better QOL than those who did not. **CONCLUSION:** This study provides information that should aid in communicating with the head and neck cancer patients scheduled for radiotherapy and in the design of preventive and interventional strategies aimed at enhancing patient support and rehabilitation