

Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: To determine the frequency of different types of tumours associated with cord compression, their mode of presentation and treatment outcome. **DESIGN:** Retrospective study. **SETTING:** Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), a teaching and referral hospital in Nairobi, Kenya, from January 1985 to December 1994. **SUBJECTS:** Thirty eight patients. **RESULTS:** There were twenty one males and seventeen females with a male/female ratio of 1.3:1 and a mean age of 36.9 years. Primary spinal cord tumours were more common (65.8%) than metastatic tumours (34.2%). The commonest spinal cord tumour was meningioma (23.7%) followed by neurofibroma (15.8%). Most of the patients (70%) did not show any clinical improvement after surgery. **CONCLUSION:** Spinal cord tumours accounted for about 15% of all CNS tumours treated at the Kenyatta National Hospital. Most of the patients had total paralysis of the limbs at the time of presentation. Meningiomas and neurofibromas were the commonest cause of cord compression at KNH. Greater effort is needed to detect these tumours early when the signs and symptoms may be reversible following surgery.