

Analysis of Presentation Delay in Patients with Advanced Breast Cancer Visiting Dharmais National Cancer Hospital

Iskandar^{1,2*}, **Retna Siwi Padmawati**³, **Susanna Hilda Hutajulu**⁴, **Meidina Fajrin**²

¹ Magister Program of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

² Department of Surgical Oncology, Dharmais Cancer Hospital - National Cancer Center, Jakarta, Indonesia.

³ Department of Health Behavior, Environment, and Social Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

⁴ Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

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*Corresponding author:

Iskandar

Department of Surgical Oncology,
Dharmais Cancer Hospital - National
Cancer Center, Jakarta, Indonesia
iskandar139@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Background: Breast cancer is still one of the significant causes of the increasing mortality rate due to cancer. Treatment of breast cancer patients was delayed by 66.34%. The majority of patients arrive at stages IIIB and IV and are therefore treated at an advanced stage. This study aimed to analyze the factors causing the arrival delay of breast cancer patients to Dharmais Cancer Hospital with advanced stages.

Methods: A descriptive study with a qualitative approach was used as the research design. In-depth interviews and document reviews were used to collect data. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 advanced-stage breast cancer patients. Thematic data analysis was performed by tracing and identifying the main topics of the entire interview process. The triangulation method was used to validate the data by conducting interviews with 4 patient families and 2 oncology surgeons, as well as document review.

Results: The presentation delay of advanced breast cancer patients was analyzed based on the interpretation and recognition of symptoms. There was an attitude of ignoring when there were symptoms and not seeking treatment. On psychological factors, there was a feeling of fear after being diagnosed and a sense of worry in the treatment process. On socioeconomic factors, there was no early detection, lack of information on early detection, waiting time constraints, and the selection of alternative treatments.

Conclusions: Late-stage breast cancer patients were drawn to Dharmais Cancer Hospital due to issues with the interpretation and experience of symptoms, psychological issues patients reported, and socioeconomic difficulties during treatment. As a result, patients must be given additional care to deal with late arrivals, especially in cases of advanced breast cancer.

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 65,858 new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in Indonesia. With an incidence of 16.6% and a second-place ranking of 22,430 (9.6%) fatalities, breast cancer is still a serious health concern in Indonesia [1]. A study found that patients who seek medical help for breast cancer at an advanced stage have a higher mortality rate [2].

Breast cancer incidence was reported by the Dharmais Cancer Hospital as follows: stage I was 6%, stage II was 18%, stage III was 44%, and stage IV was 32%. According to data from Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital Jakarta, treatment delays for patients with breast cancer reached 66.34% with the majority of patients arriving at an advanced stage [3].

Based on Breast Cancer Team Data at the Dharmais Cancer Hospital in 2020, the relative survival rate for stage 4 breast cancer during 5 years is 16.4% [4].

According to Social Security Agency of Health data for 2020, cancer is the second most expensive disease, costing IDR 3.5 trillion for 2.5 million cases at an 18% rate [5].

By performing health education and early detection, hospitals that provide healthcare services, and the Indonesian Ministry of Health have made an effort to raise public awareness. In fact, more than 65% of patients who seek treatment at hospitals are at an advanced stage. The 5-year survival rate for breast cancer patients varies by country. In developed countries such as the United States, Sweden, Japan, and Australia, it ranges from 38.8% to 80.7%, while in developing countries including Brazil, India, Algeria, and Gambia, it ranges from 12% to 58.4% [6].

Concerning this issue, the period between diagnosis and the initial consultation can have an impact on the death rate and survival rate of breast cancer patients. Delays caused by the patient, the doctor, and the system all have an impact on how quickly cancer patients receive therapy and a diagnosis. For patients, the delay factor may be due to socioeconomic and personal factors, whereas for doctors it may be due to the speed at which a response is given and the accuracy of the diagnosis, as well as from the system, such as the length of time required to receive service, the accuracy of information delivered, and the scheduling of doctor consultations [7].

Patient-related delays consist of three components, including how symptoms are understood and recognized, psychological variables, and sociodemographic and ethnic characteristics [7]. It has been demonstrated that a person's decision to seek medical treatment is influenced by how they comprehend and experience breast symptoms [8]. Some people are reluctant to go to health facilities or get examined because they are afraid of being diagnosed with breast cancer [9]. Due to the stigma associated with breast cancer, women who have it tend to favor traditional treatment facilities, which delays getting the right kind of care [10].

Patients at advanced stages require more involved diagnostic procedures, spend more money, and have shorter survival rates. Patients with breast cancer who arrive at the hospital early will receive prompt and effective medical care. The purpose of screening is to reduce morbidity and mortality and improve the quality of life for breast cancer patients. When early-stage breast cancer is discovered, action must be taken to increase the chances of recovery and extend the time to survive [11].

Based on the background explanation above, there are still many factors of delay in the community which can be the cause of the speed and accuracy of handling patients who come to the hospital, so this study aimed to analyze the various factors that cause delays in arrival at the advanced level breast cancer patients at Dharmais Cancer Hospital to get early treatment, to reduce morbidity and mortality from breast cancer.

METHODS

A descriptive study with a qualitative approach was used as the research design. This study was conducted in Dharmais Cancer Hospital's Outpatient and Inpatient Installations from July to September 2022. Purposive sampling was used with inclusion criteria for breast cancer patients aged 18 years with an advanced stage (stage IV). Patients with decreased consciousness and who had received complete cancer therapy were excluded. In-depth interviews and document reviews were used to collect data. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 advanced-stage breast cancer patients. Thematic data analysis was performed by tracing and identifying the main topics of the entire interview process. The triangulation method was used to validate the data by conducting interviews with 4 patient families and 2 oncology surgeons, as well as document review.

This study looked at delays caused by patient factors such as interpretation and recognition of symptoms, as well as psychological and socioeconomic factors. The variables of interpretation and recognition symptoms explain the first signs and symptoms noticed by breast cancer patients. For psychological variables that explain patients' mental states, thoughts, and behavior after being diagnosed with breast cancer. Furthermore, the socioeconomic variable explains the type of health service selected by the patient after being diagnosed.

RESULTS

Interpretation and recognition of symptoms

Based on the information gathered from the interviews, it was discovered that patients at the Dharmais Cancer Hospital with advanced breast cancer noticed changes in their breasts after discovering a lump accompanied by a feeling of discomfort while bathing, having an accident, and being found during other medical examinations. The informant first became aware of the difference between the right and left breasts when she experienced pain.

Patients who first notice the changes that occur because these changes do not interfere with their everyday activities are patients who first carry out examinations with doctors and other healthcare facilities after discovering there was a change in the breast. However, the informant simply checked with a doctor when his body started to feel uncomfortable. Additionally, researchers discovered informants who engaged in information-seeking behaviors connected to breast-related alterations. This is done to determine if any changes in her breasts could result in breast cancer or tumors.

It is well known that patients who permit modifications to their breasts experience delays in interpreting and recognizing their symptoms. She went

for a checkup at a hospital after experiencing discomfort in her breasts. As a result, the majority of patients' diagnoses have already reached an advanced stage.

Psychology

The search for a cancer cure may be impacted by the patient's mental state. After receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, the majority of people experience fear and worry about getting treatment. The patient's anxiety and terror contributed to the delay in his or her arrival at the hospital. The results of the interviews revealed a variety of responses on the patient's emotions following a doctor's breast cancer diagnosis. The patient's psychological condition includes concerns related to the illness as well as worry about undergoing treatment and other medical procedures. However, some people accept their diagnosis of breast cancer and think their condition will be cured after being found guilty of it.

According to the findings of the interviews, all patients had support from their families during treatment. The level of familial support each patient receives varies, though. The patient's statements regarding family support are consistent with those made by the patient's family, who consistently offer support and do their best effort to carry out therapy. Nevertheless, patients who had not previously received assistance from their family throughout treatment were also discovered by researchers during interview sessions.

Social – Economic

According to socioeconomic variables, it was discovered that breast cancer patients did not practice early detection, did not obtain information about early detection, had to wait for services, and made alternative treatment decisions.

While showering, some patients undergo early Breast Self Examination (BSE) detection. According to the evidence gathered, BSE sufferers also experienced alterations and lumps in their breasts. However, due to their lack of exposure to early detection knowledge, patient statements were still discovered that did not implement early detection. Patients typically get information on early detection from a variety of sources, including the Internet, the Breast Cancer Foundation, and physicians. Patients who respond to information provided by a variety of sources may be able to understand it and add to their understanding of the need for early detection. However, a doctor must be consulted to learn the patient's situation. Patients are not the only ones who lack access to early detection information. It is also discovered that the patient's family, who should serve as a support system during treatment, is unaware of information on breast cancer early detection.

According to patient testimonials about the medical care they received, referral procedures were difficult to complete and involved lengthy wait times. This is

regarded as having contributed to the delay in patient treatment since it disrupts the therapeutic process. After receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, the majority of patients have attempted a variety of complementary therapies and taken herbal medications in the hopes of finding a quick cure. Regarding the claims made by patients who utilize alternative services and herbal remedies, doctors strongly disagree, as using alternative treatments worsens the patient's condition and is one of the reasons why patients arrive at the hospital later than expected and at an advanced stage.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of patient interviews, it was learned that each patient saw changes in their breasts during different activities. One of the most common ones was when the patient was taking a bath and touched their breast, they felt a lump and noticed a difference between their right and left breasts. The key to giving patients a high cure rate is raising awareness of alterations in the breast. Healing is simpler if awareness is present early on. Based on the patient's knowledge and experience with breast cancer, symptoms are interpreted. The patient's symptoms and knowledge stigmatize the lump in the breast and cause it to take longer to present [8].

BSE is a breast cancer early-detection technique that employs sensations and can assist patients in being conscious of adjustments they can make when bathing [12]. Recognizing signs of BSE is crucial for patients to move forward with treatment. The therapy measures will be carried out more quickly the sooner the patient is aware of the differences discovered. The patient's decision to take action is influenced by their awareness of breast changes. Patients who self-examine their breasts will carry out the examination and realize the significance of obtaining medical attention as opposed to patients who do not self-examine their breasts, who may delay the examination [13].

According to the findings of the in-depth interviews, it was discovered that the patient was aware of changes in her breasts and went right away for a checkup at a medical facility. Some patients first look for information to understand what is happening to their bodies. However, the noticeable alterations did not interfere with his activities. Patients who put off getting checked out were more likely to be unaware of the risks and signs of breast cancer and hence not comprehend the need for treatment right away. Patients who had lumps, especially those who were pain-free, believed their condition was unimportant. This demonstrates a link between the interpretation and detection of symptoms and delays in receiving medical care [9].

Receiving a breast cancer diagnosis had several psychological effects, including despair and fear of the

disease. They experienced sadness at not having believed they had cancer as well as worry over the upcoming therapy. Patients with breast cancer are prone to worry about their situation. Additionally, it was shown that patients feel bad about their way of life. Another psychological effect that was seen was the patient's attempt to accept his circumstances, resignation, and enthusiasm for undergoing treatment.

Another reason for patient delay in treatment is a psychological condition. Following a doctor's breast cancer diagnosis, the patient's emotions will influence whether or not she seeks medical attention. Anyone with a cancer diagnosis will go through a distressing psychological condition. The psychological effects of having breast cancer will include emotions including fear, worry, excitement, and typical reactions [14]. Patients who have been diagnosed with cancer often hesitate to undergo tests at medical facilities out of fear, because there is a poor capacity for accepting the condition.

Treatment-seeking behavior is influenced by psychological factors. The decision to receive or refuse therapy is influenced by thoughts and reactions related to the treatment [15]. The findings of this study are consistent with studies done by Atashbahar et al. [16]. The psychological aspects that affect treatment-seeking behavior include anxiety, fear of cancer and treatment, perceptions of the disease, and prejudice.

Patients with breast cancer require encouragement and support from their closest family members due to psychological reasons like dread of illness and cancer treatment. According to the findings of patient interviews, relatives of breast cancer patients consistently supported them as they underwent treatment. Patients receive a variety of family support, including information about treatment options, financial assistance, and emotional and material support. To give breast cancer patients life support, family support is crucial. To prevent the patient from feeling stressed out by his cancer, the family must take care of him and assist with the healing process. To ensure the success and recovery of breast cancer patients, various family supports must be offered throughout the patient's life [17].

The fact that breast cancer is already in an advanced stage when it is identified is another factor that contributes to treatment delays for those who have the disease. Early detection is related to this as well. Patients who arrive at the hospital in the early stages will be affected better. According to the findings of the interviews, there were still many patients who lacked access to knowledge on early detection and who did not engage in early detection.

Patients who did not perform early detection methods, such as BSE, may do so due to a lack of understanding and information about breast cancer. Breast cancer can spread and develop malignancy

because early diagnosis and treatment are often delayed. Patients who lack access to early detection information hinder the disease from being treated early, and they are unaware of the value and advantages of performing breast self-examinations for breast cancer [18].

According to the findings of the interviews, the majority of patients experienced a lengthy wait before receiving medical attention. The lengthier wait times for patients were brought on by the increasing number of patients and examination series. The patient's condition will be impacted by the length of the delay; the longer the wait, the more cancer cells will develop [19].

The choice of health care was the next socioeconomic issue that could cause a delay. Social support, family finances, the tendency to ignore disease, and the presence of provider-related issues all have an impact on treatment-seeking behavior [16]. The wrong choice of health services results in a worse stage of cancer and delays in treatment [20].

The condition and progression of the disease experienced will depend on the patient's treatment options [21]. According to the results of the study's interviews, patients with advanced breast cancer tend to select alternative services rather than visiting a doctor. The lump would shrink if an alternative was taken, according to the respondents, negating the necessity for surgery. Alternative treatment selection is linked to missed therapy appointments and delayed access to medical care [22]. The results of this study showed that patients who used alternative treatments did not see any improvement in their breast cancer and even made their condition worse.

CONCLUSIONS

Patients with advanced-stage breast cancer who arrive late at the Dharmas Cancer Hospital due to symptom interpretation and recognition, where most patients are already aware of changes in their breasts such as lumps and discomfort. Patients who experience these changes, however, do not immediately take action to conduct the examination. Another factor that contributes to delays is physiological, patients' fear and anxiety about the medical procedures that will be performed. Furthermore, socioeconomic factors cause patients to arrive late, which leads to late detection and alternative treatments, both of which worsen the patient's condition.

Increased literacy and information about breast cancer prevention are needed to help people make treatment decisions. Patients with breast cancer require family support because it influences their decision to seek appropriate treatment. To reduce public concern about breast cancer, psychologists, community leaders, and scholars must be involved.

DECLARATIONS

Competing interest

The authors declare no competing interest in this study.

Ethics Approval

This research has passed the ethical review of the Committee of the Medical Research Ethics of the “Dharmais” Cancer Hospital, with committee’s reference number 180/KEPK/VII/2022

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