Knowledge and Adherence to Exercise Recommendations Among Oncologic Patients

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Introduction

Physical activity positively influences various aspects of cancer treatment. Among patients (pts) undergoing active therapy, it improves physical capacity, treatment tolerability, and reduces side effects. For cancer survivors, it lowers the risk of recurrence of tumors such as breast and colorectal. Despite its importance, the extent to which pts are informed about exercise recommendations remains unclear.

Objectives

To evaluate the perception of cancer patients regarding the performance of physical activity. In addition, as a secondary objective, this study also aims to identify possible barriers and facilitators in this process so that it is possible to implement programs that enable the adherence of patients with cancer (current or previous) to healthier lifestyle

Methods

We conducted a self-administered survey to evaluate exercise habits and knowledge among cancer pts treated between 2022 and 2024. Participants were recruited from a private oncology network (with units across Brazil) and two public cancer centers. Pts, irrespective of tumor type, disease stage, or treatment phase, completed the survey via RedCap.

Table 1. Results

Variable	Received recommendation	Adherence to physical activity	Knowledge of recommended type and duration
Health system			
Private	96.3%	69.4%	77.8%
Public	61.3%	33.3%	44.6%
P value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Race			
White	92.7%	67.9%	76.5%
Black	77.3%	54.6%	60.9%
P-value	<0.001	0.008	0.001
Primary tumor			
Breast	92.5%	73.3%	76.9%
Other	79.9%	52.7%	62.2%
P-value	<0.001	<0.001	0.002

Results

Of the 394 pts who answered the survey, 76.4% were female. Median age was 56 years (range 23 – 92). The cohort included 52.8% self-identified white pts and 44.8% black/mixed race pts; 63.9% were treated in the private health system and 36.1% in the public.

The most common primary tumors were breast (47.7%) and gastrointestinal (16.2%). While 85.9% reported receiving any exercise recommendations from physicians, only 62.5% described themselves as physically active. In addition, 30.7% stated they lacked knowledge about the type or duration of recommended exercises.

Exercise guidance and adherence were lower among patients treated in public health centers, black/mixed race pts, and those with non-breast cancer (Table). Notably, 94.2% of pts without sufficient information expressed a desire to learn more about exercise

Variability in exercise awareness based on health system type and race highlights disparities that must be addressed. Promoting physical activity awareness and accessibility is crucial. Exercise should not remain a privilege for a few but rather a fundamental aspect of care accessible to all patients.

Although most cancer pts receive general physical activity advice, adherence to and understanding of specific exercise guidelines remain suboptimal.

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