EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF PATIENTS WITH CANCER OF THE HEAD AND NECK AT THE STAGE OF PREPARATION FOR RADIATION THERAPY

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The current data show that about 60% of cancer patients need radiation therapy (RT) at different stages of anticancer treatment: both as a self-sufficient mode and in schemes of combination and multimodality treatment. In some cancer types, this method of treatment is an alternative to surgery at early stages, to make it possible to save an organ and its functions or when surgery is impossible. Modern technologies with modulation of radiation beam intensity and visual control of irradiation accuracy allow influencing malignant tumours with high accuracy up to a millimetre, but it is not possible to completely avoid radiation reactions. [1,2].

RT have not only physical side effects, but also consequences for patients' mental health. Irradiation is considered by patients as an invisible and intangible factor that is beyond control, so it causes increased anxiety and stress, pessimistic perception of the prospects of anticancer treatment. [3,4].

Purpose: to study the features of the emotional health of patients with head and neck cancer in preparation for radiation treatment.

Materials and methods. Conducted a psychodiagnostic study of 6 patients with head and neck cancer aged 40 to 61 years old (including 3 women and 3 men) to prepare for RT. All patients got RT in the clinic State Organization «Grigoriev Institute for Medical Radiology and Oncology of the National Academy of Medical Sciences of Ukraine». Distress Thermometer and structured interviews were used to determine the psycho-emotional status of cancer patients. The study is conducted as part of research "Optimize topometric preparation for radiation therapy of patients with head and neck cancer." State registration No 0119U103013.
Results and discussions: As a result of the analysis of the obtained results it was established that the average level of patient’s distress at the stage of preparation for radiation therapy was 4.5 points (on a 10-point scale, where 1 is the minimum level of distress, 10 is the maximum level, which leads to maladaptation). In men, this index was slightly higher than in women (5.0 points vs. 3.6, respectively).

All patients (100%) noted the presence of emotional problems: 5 patients (83.33%) indicated the presence of fears, 4 patients (66.67%) noted the presence of nervousness, 2 (33.33%) had expressed loss of interest in the usual activities, the same number noted sadness and anxiety, 1 person (16.67%) indicated the presence of depression.

2 patients (33.33%) associated the presence of distress with feelings about the possibility of losing a job, 2 patients (33.33%) - with a relationship with the spouse, the same number (33.33%) - with the acceptance of difficult decision of radiation treatment. Four patients (66.67%) associated distress with feelings about the health of their family members. 1 man (16.67%) was worried about the possibility of having children after RT.

During the interview, it was found that the emotional state of patients is negatively affected by cognitive distortions about RT. They claim that RT is very painful, that RT makes a person radioactive, and that RT causes hair loss and nausea. Awareness of this greatly worsened the emotional state of patients in preparation for RT.

Conclusions: The results show that in preparation for the course of RT for patients with head and neck cancer, it is very important to work with a psychologist, because this work will be aimed at reducing anxiety and normalizing emotional state, preventing the development of depression. Also, an important area of work of a medical psychologist at this stage is psychoeducational work to debunk the myths about RT (correction of the cognitive sphere) and the formation of behaviour aimed at treatment.

References: