Abstract

Introduction: Cultural influences affect attitudes towards cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment and palliation. The objective of this study is to survey the prevailing attitudes towards cancer in a multicultural tertiary outpatient setting. Materials and Methods: This is a cross-sectional study of 300 respondents visiting the Singapore General Hospital (SGH) Urology Centre over a period of 1 month. A questionnaire was developed assessing responses to various facets of cancer management and administered in English, Chinese or Malay to every 10th person visiting the centre. Institutional review board approval was obtained. Results: Of 300 respondents, 57% were Chinese, 17% Malay, 19% Indian, and 7% others. Mean age was 54.3 years. Most respondents were male (68%) and had up to secondary education (56%). Most Chinese were Taoist/Buddhist (42%) or Christian/Catholic (36%) while Indians were largely Hindu (47%) or Muslim (27%). Thirty-seven percent of respondents had ever participated in cancer screening. Eighty-nine percent of respondents wanted to be the first to know if they had cancer, and 76% found it unacceptable if the diagnosis of cancer was withheld from them. These were irrespective of race, religion or other factors. Forty percent of respondents believed that being diagnosed with cancer was a matter of fate. Sixty percent of respondents would undergo treatment with 50% chance of cure, even if it involved major surgery and adjuvant therapy. Eighty-one percent believed in efficacy of at least 1 form of alternative treatment. Seventy-one percent of respondents preferred to die at home and this was most marked among Malay respondents (90.4%). Conclusion: This better understanding of patient attitudes will allow us to help patients balance wishes for autonomy versus family involvement in dealing with cancer. This will help us achieve a more holistic and patient-centred approach to cancer care.

Key words: Attitude, Autonomy, Confidentiality, Culture