



Supportive care of patients with breast cancer: The role of the oncology social worker in India

¹ Dimple Rajshekar Rai, ² Dr. Janet Parameshwara, ^{*3} Dr. Sandesh KS

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, (Medical Social Work), Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

² Head, Medical Social Worker and Social Welfare officer, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology Bangalore, Karnataka, India

³ Head, Department of PG Studies in Social Work, Nehru Memorial College, Sullia, Karnataka, India

Abstract

The prevalence of breast cancer in India and around the world has been rising in the recent past. The role that the healthcare sector plays in dealing with the disease has become more significant. The healthcare providers, for example, are required to provide support to the patients and their families during and after the treatment for the disease. This group of health workers includes oncology social workers whose role is to work with the oncology team to assist patients in the described ways. This essay analyzes the role of oncology social workers in India in dealing with breast cancer.

Keywords: prevalence, breast cancer, oncology social worker

Introduction

Cancer of the breast is considered the most prevalent type of cancer among Indian women with an age-adjusted prevalence of as high as 25.8 for every 10000 females (Boxwala *et al.*, 2010) [3]. It should also be noted that the disease has a mortality rate of 12.7 for every 10000 women in the nation. Statistical reports from different latest registries of the nation were analyzed and compared against each other for incidence, rates of mortality. The findings of the age adjusted prevalence of breast carcinoma indicate rates as high as forty-one for every 10000 women from Delhi followed by Chennai, which had a rate of 37.9, Bangalore with a rate of 34.4, and the Thiruvananthapuram District with a rate of 33.7 (Malvia *et al.*, 2017) [6]. There has been an increase in the statistical significance in age-adjusted prevalence from 1982 to 2014 in all of the nation's PBCRs namely Mumbai (yearly percentage change 1.42%), Delhi (1.44%), Chennai (2.44%), Bhopal (2.00%), Barshi (1.87%), and Bangalore (2.84%).

The incidence-to-mortality ration was further established to be as high as sixty-six within the rural registries and as low as eight in the urban ones were. Besides, such a young age was found to be the primary risk factor for the development of breast cancer among women in India. The projection of breast cancer for India in 2020 suggests that the number of people suffering from the illness would be as high as 1797900 (Malvia *et al.*, 2017) [6]. For such a reason, there is a need for the healthcare sector of the nation to devise approaches to dealing with the disease, which includes empowering the oncology social workers who play a critical role in the treatment of cancer for this group of people. The objective of this essay, therefore, is to describe the special role that oncology social workers play in the enhancement of care services of patents with breast cancer in India.

The role of oncology social worker

Social workers play critical roles in meeting the overall

objectives of the multidisciplinary oncology team for people suffering from cancer as well as their families (Miller *et al.*, 2008) [7]. Most of the social workers in the oncology field are always mental health clinicians who have a master's degree and who possess the expertise in the mobilization of community resources, patient education, group, family, and individual counseling, and psychosocial assessment (Leong *et al.*, 2010) [5]. The social workers, therefore, aid in the bridging of the gap existing between the practical human needs of the patients and the technologically sophisticate system of health care in India and the globe. The oncology social worker thus helps in complementing the patient care team through the representation and attention to the psychosocial support of the people living with breast cancer and their families.

To assist the breast cancer patients in their adjustment to diagnosis and the maintenance of their family and personal functioning to a maximum level possible, the oncology social workers first perform thorough psychosocial evaluations. The social workers also employ brief tools of screening in the modern increasingly streamlined practice that are efficient within the ambulatory or acute care environments (Green, & Raina, 2008; Bawa, 2012) [4, 2]. The social workers then prepare plans of care in collaboration with the rest of the team assigned to such care in the provision of counselling for both family and patient. The oncology social workers also help in the preparation of plans to assist the patients with insurance issues, an access to the relevant community resources, and maintaining follow-up activities with the patient.

Oncology social workers in India should use a wide range of modalities of counselling, which may include group, family, and individual therapy, identification of behavior, intervention for crises, and emotional support for their patients. Additionally, the oncology social workers help in educating the patients and their families concerning the nature of breast cancer, the plans of treatment, and the options of pain management (Shin *et al.*, 2010; Rescigno, Zampell, &

Axelrod, 2009) ^{19, 81}. Oncology social workers around the world are also increasingly expanding their roles into the non-pharmacologic cancer pain management through their collaboration with chaplains, clinical nurse specialists, and psychiatrists.

The knowledge of oncology social workers in community resources offers a direct connection with mental health services as well as additional agencies for cancer support. Such a connection enables the patients in the mobilization of appropriate systems of support for their care. It should also be noted that the oncology social worker also aids the patients in accessing financial resources as well as other post-discharge resources, which include home care and services of nutrition. The services could be specifically useful for the breast cancer patients who always require an extensive care system.

Another role of the oncology social workers is assisting the breast cancer patients and their family in making the relevant decisions through informing them concerning the available options that could help them. They also accomplish this role through clarifying the general misconceptions concerning the ailment and its treatment, as well as facilitation of communication among members of the family and oncology, family, and patient teams (Agarwal & Ramakant, 2008) ¹¹. With the progression of the disease, the social worker are supposed to inform the patients and their families concerning the probable effects of treatment on the quality of life of patients, the obtainability of hospice services and the type of home-based care that would be useful for their case.

Oncology social workers are also supposed to help the patients in dealing with psychosocial issues. In this case, the social workers may help the people living with breast cancer and their family through the maximization of treatment potential, on physical levels through aiding them access patient care in an easier manner than they could have managed if they had worked alone. The oncology social workers are further supposed to help the patients suffering from cancer on an emotional level through easing their concerns about the quality of life with the disease. Patients who experience a collection of psychosocial issues might have difficulties in both accessing enough cancer treatment and in responding to the usually rigorous and expensive care services offered by their preferred institution. The concern about psychological distress issues has emerged as one of the most significant issues that require to be addressed. Specifically, the patients develop the psychological distress issues because of the medication procedures that they undergo. Therefore, the role of oncology social workers is the in this category is of special importance to the breast cancer patients.

In conclusion, the oncology social worker plays a significant role in helping patients of breast cancer in India in both the treatment process and after the treatment. As this essay has described, the social workers complement the oncology team that helps patients access the best medical care services for their condition and avoid psychosocial issues after they undergo such medication. The challenge to India is to empower oncology social workers to bolster its capacity to deal with the growing prevalence of breast cancer in the nation.

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