

januar 2009, University of Oslo:

” A study of long-term effects after radiotherapy in survivors of locally advanced cervical cancer”

The survival rate after treatment for cervical cancer is increasing, leading to focus on persisting symptoms in cervical cancer survivors (CCSs). This was the basis for this thesis in gynaecological oncology, where 91 women treated with pelvic radiotherapy at the Norwegian Radium Hospital between 1994 and 1999 have responded to a questionnaire on somatic and mental symptoms. A subgroup also had blood tests on malabsorption.

The aims of this thesis were twofold. First, to critically review previous studies on quality of life (QOL) in CCSs. Second, to compare the prevalence of somatic and mental symptoms in CCSs with corresponding symptoms reported by an age-matched normative sample, to examine the relationship between physicians' toxicity scoring and patient-reported symptoms, and finally to investigate the effect of pelvic radiotherapy on cobalamin status and other markers of intestinal absorption in CCSs compared to reference populations.

The review study indicated that QOL in CCSs is reduced compared to the general female population following radiotherapy. However, shortcomings in both methodology and content of the studies prevent firm conclusions. The clinical study demonstrated that CCSs with chronic fatigue (30%) had significantly lower QOL, more anxiety and depression and more physical impairments than CCSs without chronic fatigue. Furthermore, the prevalence of patient-reported symptoms from the intestines, the bladder, and the vagina in CCSs was significantly higher than those rated by the physicians. Compared to the normative group, CCSs had more sexual problems, more diarrhoea, and more nausea. Compared to reference values, the CCSs subsample with blood tests showed significant cobalamin deficiency (20%) and low calcium (15%) indicating intestinal malabsorption. The conclusion is that long-term symptoms from the pelvic organs are frequent in CCSs after radiotherapy. When present, chronic fatigue is associated with high levels of somatic and mental symptoms.

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