Physical Exercise and Quality of Life in Breast Cancer Survivors

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Abstract:

An important goal for cancer patients is to improve the quality of life (QOL) by maximising functions affected by the disease and its therapy. Preliminary research suggests that exercise may be an effective intervention for enhancing QOL in cancer survivors. Research has provided preliminary evidence for the safety, feasibility, and efficacy of exercise training in breast cancer survivors. The aim of this study was to assess the association between physical exercise and quality of life in a population of female breast cancer survivors, followed up from diagnosis to the off-treatment time period, and investigated about their exercise habits in pre-diagnosis. A total of 212 female breast cancer survivors consecutively registered from January 2002 to December 2006 at a Supportive Care Unit in an Italian Oncology Department were enrolled. Exercise behaviour was assessed by the Leisure Score Index (LSI) of the Godin Leisure-Time Exercise Questionnaire. Patients were asked to report their average weekly exercise for three cancer-related time periods, i.e. pre-diagnosis, during active treatment and off-treatment. Quality of life was assessed by the Italian version of the WHOQOL-BREF standardised instrument. Statistical analysis indicated significant differences across the cancer-relevant time-periods for all exercise behaviour outcomes: the exercise behaviour was significantly lower during both on- and off-treatment than during prediagnosis; exercise during active treatment was significantly lower than during off-treatment. QOL strongly decreases during active treatment. Significant correlations were found between total exercise on- and off-treatment and all QOL indicators. Strenuous exercise is strongly correlated with QOL. Absent/mild exercise seems to be inversely correlated with a positive perception of disease severity and with quality of life on all axes. Need clearly results for inclusion of physical activity programs in comprehensive, complementary treatment regimes for breast cancer patients in Italian oncology departments.

Keywords: Physical exercise, quality of life, breast cancer survivors, Italian Oncology

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