NEOPLASMS IN LUPUS PATIENTS: EVALUATION OF PATIENTS' AWARENESS

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BACKGROUND

As survival rate among patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) improves, the risk of cancer also increases. Also, recent studies suggest a higher risk of some cancers' development in these individuals when compared to the general population. On the other hand, SLE patients seem to be less likely to undergo appropriate screening. Therefore, the present study aimed to evaluate lupus patient's awareness about most common cancers.

METHODS

A cross-sectional analysis of neoplasm data, collected as part of a longitudinal study on lupus prognostic factors, was performed using information gathered from telephone interviews with female patients over 18 years old, who were also followed up at a lupus outpatient tertiary rheumatology clinic. The interview evaluated the patients' previous knowledge of the most frequent cancers in general population, the increased risk of neoplasms associated to lupus, the guidance from medical staff regarding screening and their willingness in doing it if they know how.

RESULTS

The mean (SD) age of the 144 patients included was 44.7 (12.3) years. The types of cancer identified as the first most frequent in general population were: breast (66.0%), cervical (17.7%), and skin (8.2%), followed by colorectal (3.3%) and endometrial (2.2%). The second most frequent were cervical (32.6%), breast (17.7%), endometrial (6.7%), skin (5.2%) and colorectal (1.5%). Sixty-eight (46.9%) participants subscribed to the maxim: "SLE patients have higher risk of having cancer", of which 38.2% stated that the hazard encompasses all types of cancer, while 47.1% declared that SLE only increases the risk of specific cancer, being breast, skin, leukemia and/or lymphoma, colorectal, and stomach the most identified ones. Only 9 (6.3%) patients received proper guidance from the health care team about screening, whereas 135 (93.7%) answered they would undergo screening if indicated.

CONCLUSION

The most common neoplasms in Brazilian women are breast (29.7%), nonmelanoma skin (27.1%), colorectal (9.2%), cervical (7.5%), lung (5.6%) and thyroid (5.4%). Lupus patients correctly identified most of these cancers. There is lack of knowledge among patients regarding the association of SLE with neoplasms, as SLE seems to increase the chance of some specific cancers (e.g., lymphoma and lung), which were not identified by interviewed patients. Breast, colorectal and cervical cancers have the highest mortality rates among Brazilian women, all with well-defined screening programs. Nonetheless, the health care team has failed to provide patients with adequate cancer screening information, even for patients willing to do so.

KEYWORDS

Health education, Systemic lupus erythematosus, Screening, Neoplasm, Cancer.