

Cross-Sectional Study of the Physical Functioning of Head and Neck Cancer Survivors Up To One Year Post Treatment In an Irish National Cancer Centre

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Background:

People living with HNC experience similar survivorship needs to other cancer types as well as unique biopsychosocial issues. Little is known about their global physical function. The primary aim of this study was to profile the physical function of HNC survivors following completion of their cancer treatment.

Methods:

Participants were recruited (n=30) from HNC clinics, for 21 weeks at St. James'™s Hospital Dublin. Baseline demographics and surgical details were obtained. The following assessments were conducted; Grip Strength, 30 Second Sit to Stand, Short Physical Performance Battery (SPPB), Clinical Frailty Scale, Neck Disability Index, FACT H&N for HRQOL, falls history, self-perceived physical recovery, and early lymphoedema signs. Clinically indicated onward referrals made by the research physiotherapist were recorded.

Results:

Location of HNCs were oral cavity (n=17), laryngeal (n=3), hypopharyngeal (n=5) and oropharyngeal (n=5), 66.7% were males and 33.3% females, with a mean (SD) age of 65.1 (9.1) years. Eighty-seven percent (n=26) had primary surgical intervention, 43.3% (n=13) had radiotherapy and 33.3% (n=20) had chemotherapy. Eighty percent were < 6 months post completion of cancer treatment. Mean (SD) handheld grip strength was 27.5 (8.5) kgs, mean (SD) number of stands in 30 seconds was 11.10 (3.9), the median (IQR) SPPB score was 10 (3). Twenty-two percent (n=5) reported a fall in the last 12 months. Twenty-five percent (n=7) had head and neck lymphoedema and 76.7% (n=23) reported neck disability. The FACT H&N showed mild to moderate impairment.

Conclusion:

This study shows deficits in this post-treatment HNC population, and has identified global weakness, early signs of Lymphoedema, neck disability and mild to moderate impairments in HRQOL. Clearly there is a need for future studies that are targeted at rehabilitation after treatment for HNC.