

THE ATTITUDES OF TURKISH WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER TOWARDS USING THE INTERNET FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION CONCERNING THEIR DISEASE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present study evaluates the attitudes of Turkish women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease.

Patients and Methods: Seventy-two women with breast cancer who volunteered to participate in the study were asked to fill in the study questionnaires during the interviews on admission. The study questionnaires included eight questions regarding demographic characteristics and two questions regarding their attitude towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer.

Results: Thirty-seven patients were aged between 45 and 65 years (52%), thirty-six patients were primary school graduates (50%), fifty-three patients were unemployed (74%), fifty patients lived in urban residences (69%), eleven patients were computer literates (15%), ten patients had access to the Internet (14%), fifteen patients had made an attempt at obtaining information concerning breast cancer (21%) and three patients had made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer (4%).

Conclusion: The present study discloses the unenthusiastic attitudes of Turkish women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease.

Keywords: breast cancer, Turkish women, the internet, demographic characteristics

MEME KANSERİ TANISI ALMIŐ TRK KADINLARININ HASTALIKLARI İLE İLGİLİ BİLGİ ARAYIŐINDA İNTERNET KULLANIMI

ZET

Amaç: Bu alıŐma hastalıkları ile meme kanseri tanısı almıŐ Trk kadınlarının hastalıklarına iliŐkin bilgi edinmek amacı ile internet kullanımını belirleyen etkenlerin ortaya konulması amaçlanmıŐtır.

Hastalar ve Yöntem: alıŐmaya katılmak iin gnll olan yetmiŐiki meme kanserli kadının baŐvuru grŐmelerinde alıŐma sorularını cevaplandırmaları istendi. alıŐma soruları demografik zellikleri ile ilgili sekiz soru ve meme kanseri ile ilgili bilgi edinmek iin internet kullanımı durumu ile ilgili iki soruyu iermekteydi.

Bulgular: Otuzyedii hastanın yaŐı 45-65 yaŐ arasında (%52), otuzaltı hasta ilkokul mezunu (%50), elli hasta iŐsiz (%74), elli hasta kırsal blgede (%69) yaŐamakta, onbir hasta bilgisayar kullanmayı biliyor (%15), on hastanın internet ulaŐımı var (%14), onbeŐ hasta meme kanseri ile bilgi edinmek iin giriŐimde bulunmuŐ (%21) ve  hasta meme kanseri ile bilgi edinmek iin internet kullanmıŐ (%4) idi.

Sonuç: Bu alıŐma, meme kanseri tanısı almıŐ Trk kadınlarının hastalıklarına iliŐkin bilgi edinmek amacı ile internet kullanımı konusunda isteksiz oldukları sonucunu ortaya koymuŐtur.

Anahtar szckler: meme kanser, Trk kadınları, internet, demografik zellikler

Introduction

The importance of having an insight regarding the attitude of women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease should be highlighted in an attempt to improve the websites providing such information in terms of the reliability as well as the availability and the accessibility. However, the evaluation of the attitudes of Turkish women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease has not been attempted to date. The present study evaluates the attitudes of Turkish women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease.

Materials and Methods

The study was performed at the Gazi University Faculty of Medicine, Department of Radiation Oncology between 1st October 2003 and 31st December 2003 on seventy-two women with breast cancer who were diagnosed within one year, spoke Turkish, and volunteered to participate. The participants were asked to fill in the study questionnaire during the face to face interview upon admission. The study questionnaire included eight questions regarding the demographic characteristics (age, marital status, education, employment status, household income, residence, computer literacy, and access to the Internet) and two questions regarding their attitude towards using the Internet for obtaining

Table 1. The attitudes towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer by demographic characteristics

<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	<i>Attempt at obtaining information concerning breast cancer</i>		<i>Attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer</i>	
	<i>Not made (n = 57)</i>	<i>Made (n = 15)</i>	<i>Not made (n = 69)</i>	<i>Made (n = 3)</i>
Age				
Less than 45 years (n = 29)	22	7	28	1
Between 45 and 65 years (n = 37)	29	8	35	2
More than 65 years (n = 6)	6	0	6	0
Marital status				
Married (n = 52)	43	9	52	0
Widow (n = 14)	13	1	13	1
Single (n = 6)	1	5	4	2
Education				
Illiterate (n = 13)	11	2	13	0
Primary school graduate (n = 36)	31	5	36	0
High school graduate (n = 18)	15	3	18	0
University graduate (n = 5)	0	5	2	3
Employment status				
Unemployed (n = 53)	44	9	53	0
Employed (n = 14)	8	6	11	3
Retired (n = 5)	5	0	5	0
Household income				
Less than 500 NTL (n = 25)	23	2	25	0
Between 500 and 1.000 NTL (n = 30)	25	5	30	0
More than 1.000 NTL (n = 17)	9	8	14	3
Residence				
Rural residence (n = 22)	22	0	22	0
Urban residence (n = 50)	35	15	47	3
Computer literacy				
Computer illiterate (n = 61)	53	8	61	0
Computer literate (n = 11)	4	7	8	3
Access to the Internet				
No access to the Internet (n = 62)	54	8	62	0
Access to the Internet (n = 10)	3	7	7	3

information concerning breast cancer (attempting to obtain information concerning breast cancer and attempting to use the Internet for information concerning breast cancer).

Results

Twenty-nine patients were less than 45 years old (40%), thirty-seven patients were between 45 and 65 years (52%) and six patients were more than 65 years (8%). Fifty-two patients were married (72%), fourteen patients were widows (20%), and six patients were single (8%). Thirteen patients were illiterate (18%), thirty-six patients were primary school graduates (50%), eighteen patients were high school graduates (25%), and five patients were university graduates (7%). Fifty-three patients were unem-

ployed (74%), fourteen patients were employed (19%), and five patients were retired (7%). Twenty-five patients had a monthly household income less than 500 New Turkish Liras (35%), thirty patients had a monthly household income between 500 and 1,000 New Turkish Liras (41%), and seventeen patients had a monthly household income more than 1,000 New Turkish Liras (24%). Twenty-two patients lived in rural residences (31%) and fifty patients lived in urban residences (69%). Sixty-one patients were computer illiterate (85%) and eleven patients were computer literate (15%). Sixty-two patients had no access to the Internet (86%) and ten patients had access to the Internet (14%). Fifty-seven patients had not made an attempt at obtaining information concerning breast cancer (79%) and fifteen patients had made an attempt at obtaining information concerning breast

cancer (21%). Sixty-nine patients had not made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer (96%) and three patients had made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer (4%) (Table 1).

Discussion and Conclusion

When compared to the conventional mass communication tools such as newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, and television broadcasts, the Internet might appear as the promising unconventional mass communication tool that brings on the anonymous, yet the unimpeded, environment for the women with breast cancer to provide information concerning their disease at an instant and at no cost. The women with breast cancer exhibit unenthusiastic, yet diverse, attitudes towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. Raupach and Hiller evaluated the degree of the satisfaction with the information concerning breast cancer provided on various mass communication tools in a survey that involved a sample of Australian women with breast cancer (1). In that study, 89% of the women were satisfied with the information provided on the Internet, 46% of the women were satisfied with the information provided on television broadcasts, 52% of the women were satisfied with the information provided in newspapers, 58% of the women were satisfied with the information provided in magazines, and 60% of the women were satisfied with the information provided on radio stations.

Based on the fact that most are self-directed and self-financed, websites providing information concerning cancer are not necessarily subject to assistance by the oncologists or official screening by the cancer organizations in terms of the reliability. Moreover, providing reliable information concerning their disease for patients with cancer is the moral assignment as well as the legal commitment for the oncologists. Therefore, oncologists should attempt to assist in improving the websites providing information concerning breast cancer in terms of the reliability and such assistance should unquestionably take into account the attitudes of the women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. However, oncologists exhibit unenthusiastic attitudes towards the information concerning cancer provided on the Internet and point out that the attempts at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning cancer might be harmful in the sense that the patients might arrive at unrealistic expectations (2). From another aspect, oncologists exhibit diverse attitudes towards the attitude of the patients with cancer using the Internet for obtaining information concerning cancer. They state that the information provided on the Internet concerning cancer results in their patients to better understand their disease and to be further involved the decision making process concerning their treatment. On the other hand, the oncologists admit that they experience difficulty and feel threatened when discussing the information concerning cancer provided on the Internet with their patients. In conclusion, the oncologists proclaim that the attempts at using the Internet for

obtaining information concerning their disease simultaneously renders the patients hopeful and motivated, yet anxious and confused (3).

In their attempts at obtaining information concerning their disease, the women with breast cancer might opt for using the Internet among various mass communication tools. However, studies that evaluate the attitudes of women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease are scarce. In a survey that involved a sample of American women with breast cancer, Satterlund and colleagues evaluated the attitudes of the patients towards obtaining information concerning their disease provided on various mass communication tools (4). In that study, 49% of patients had made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. Moreover, 26% of the patients were interested in obtaining information concerning their disease and 26% of the patients were interested in obtaining information concerning their treatment. The younger age and the higher education were established as the determinants of the attempts at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer. Fogel and colleagues evaluated the attitudes of the patients towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease in a survey that involved a sample of American women with breast cancer (5). In that study, 42% of the patients had made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. The higher the education and the higher the household income were established as the determinants of the attempts at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer.

With reference to Turkey's Statistical Yearbook for 2005, 12% of Turkish women were computer literate and 9% of Turkish women had access to the Internet. Upon stratification of Turkish women in accordance with their age, 16% were computer literate and 12% had access to the Internet for those who were aged less than 45 years as opposed to 3% and 2%, respectively, for those who were aged between 45 and 65 years. Upon stratification of Turkish women in accordance with their education, 1% were computer literate and less than 1% had access to the Internet for those who were primary school graduates as opposed to 65% and 58%, respectively, for those who were university graduates. Upon stratification of Turkish women in accordance with their residence, 4% were computer literate and 3% had access to the Internet for those who lived in rural residences as opposed to 17% and 13%, respectively, for those who lived in urban residences (6). The present study came up with comparatively superior figures regarding Turkish women with breast cancer such that 15% were computer literate, 14% had access to the Internet, 21% had made an attempt at obtaining information concerning their disease, and 4% had made an attempt at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. Younger age, higher education, higher household income, and urban residence correlated with comparatively superior figures regarding Turkish women with breast cancer considering the

computer literacy and the access to the Internet. As the consequence, considering the attempts at obtaining information concerning breast cancer as well as attempts at using the Internet for obtaining information concerning breast cancer, comparatively superior figures were attained regarding Turkish women with breast cancer for those who were computer literates and for those who had access to the Internet.

The present study discloses the unenthusiastic attitudes of Turkish women with breast cancer towards using the Internet for obtaining information concerning their disease. Websites providing information concerning breast cancer should be improved in reliability in cooperation with oncologists and cancer organizations, and in terms of the availability and accessibility of said websites should incorporate educational resources as well as financial resources. The present study provides Turkish oncologists as well as Turkish cancer organizations an insight regarding such attempts.

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