A longitudinal mixed methods study of the psychological impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women undergoing treatment for ovarian cancer

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Abstract

Introduction
COVID-19 is an unprecedented crisis in modern cancer care. Research is required to identify how the crisis is affecting the psychological wellbeing of women undergoing treatment for ovarian cancer to help guide clinicians and charities providing support at this time.

For women diagnosed with ovarian cancer the impact of the crisis on their treatment raises urgent questions about their psychological and supportive care for three reasons: 1) fear of progression is already a primary concern for many patients, and this will worsen with treatment disruption; 2) the negative psychological effects of shielding will exacerbate distress; 3) early distress, and encountering more difficulties in treatment are indicators or risk for persistent distress after treatment.

Research questions:

1) how are women undergoing treatment for ovarian cancer affected psychologically by the COVID-19 crisis, and how do these impacts change over time?
2) how are women responding and adjusting to these experiences?
3) what are the unmet informational and emotional support needs of women in the crisis

Methodology
The design is a mixed methods prospective cohort study of the psychological adaptation of women with advanced ovarian cancer to the Covid-19 crisis. Each question will be addressed by analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative arm
Eighty women undergoing treatment for ovarian cancer from third sector providers, and two cancer centres will be recruited at the start of the study, and followed for 8 months. For the quantitative arm data will be collected at 2 month intervals giving 5 data collection points (T0 (study intake), T1 (2 months) and T2 (4 months).

Measures

1. Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale
2. Brief Illness Perception Questionnaire
3. Brief COPE
4. Fear of Progression Questionnaire, short form

5. Supportive Care Needs Survey, short form

6. PTSD Checklist - Civilian

Qualitative arm

Up to 15 participants from the quantitative arm will be recruited into the qualitative arm. This will comprise an interview via telephone or skype.

Discussion

The research will help:

- clinicians understand how their patients are approaching coping with the demands of the crisis
- identify any unmet informational and emotional support needs of advanced ovarian cancer patients
- quantitatively track the psychological impact of the crisis on the wellbeing of ovarian cancer patients
- provide information about the temporal variation in fear of progression, and its relationship to other psychological variables, that may guide future intervention design

BGCS Award: £10,000

Ethical approval (REC reference: 20/HRA/3375) obtained on 17th July 2020.

Sponsor: Nottingham Trent University