

Elderly cancer patients' preferences regarding the disclosure of cancer diagnosis. Experience of a single institution in Italy

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ABSTRACT

The disclosure of a diagnosis of cancer is complex, particularly in older patients for reasons related to the wishes of the family, fear of discouraging the patient, or the patient's inability to understand the information. So our insight into older people's perspectives regarding the disclosure of their cancer diagnosis is fragmentary and inadequate. To examine the views of older adults regarding this issue, we performed a prospective observational study in an inpatient oncology clinic. From January 2006 to June 2006, a sample of 132 consecutive cancer patients aged over 70 years with a variety of solid tumors, recently diagnosed and mainly at an advanced stage, agreed to take part in a survey about the disclosure of the diagnosis of their disease. Of the 132 patients who verbally agreed to participate and were given questionnaires, 106 returned data. The majority of patients (64.1%) in this study wanted to be informed about the diagnosis of their disease also if it was cancer, and 58.5% were in fact informed about the exact nature of their disease. Male patients were more keen to know the diagnosis than female patients ($P = 0.002$) and they were in fact more informed about their diagnosis than female patients ($P = 0.005$). Patients with more formal education were more informed than patients with less formal education ($P = 0.035$). This study demonstrates that the preferences of older patients regarding cancer diagnosis disclosure are highly similar to those of younger people. Male patients and patients with more formal education were more informed than female patients and patients with less formal education.

Key words: elderly patients, cancer diagnosis, communication of bad news, informed consent.

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