Toward a New Model of Care for Malignant Mesothelioma: The Approach of the University of Turin

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Abstract

Aim: The present paper has 2 main purposes: 1) increasing the awareness about the activities needed for the management of patients suffering from a rare and fatal tumor (such as malignant mesothelioma) and their families; 2) shedding light on a highly specialized multidisciplinary health-care service developed in Italy and based on an ongoing process of empirical research.

Methods: This short narrative report briefly presents an overview upon the Italian actual model for the management of malignant mesothelioma. In particular, since the 80's Italy has started surveillance plans aimed at assessing the impact of the disease throughout the Country, which led to the individuation of National Contaminated Priority Sites (NCPS). Beside epidemiological and genetic trials often experimented in NCPSs to increase the survival time, psychological issues have recently gained an increasing importance. Thus, a new model of care rooted in a welfare mix approach has been developed in a pilot-NCPS.

Future directions: Our commitment for the future is to apply this model other NCPSs displaying the presence of asbestos, in order to offer an effective model of care, tailored on psychological needs of mesothelioma patients and their families.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 80’s Italy has started surveillance epidemiological plan aimed at assessing the impact of mesothelioma (with any location) throughout the Country. This kind of initiative has led to the constitution of the National Register of Mesothelioma (Registro Nazionale Mesoteliomi - ReNaM) and to the identification of areas of big concern for public health for what concerns remedial works (National Priority Contaminated Site - NPCSs). These data represent a useful tool for clinicians and researchers, shedding lights upon what we might term “invisible disasters” and increasing the awareness of health services and institutions. During the last decades epidemiological, Oncological and most recently genetic studies conducted in NCPSs have contributed to the understanding of the epigenetic mechanism of mesothelioma and to the development of different strategies of interventions (i.e. radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and surgery) aimed at increasing the survival time of patients.

Beside those facets of this problem of public concern, psychological issues have gained an increasing importance in these areas and a recent systematic literature review suggests that the psychological experience of mesothelioma is different from that of other lung cancers. Thus, mesothelioma patients seem to have specific psychological care needs [1].

In the present paper, we would like to offer a brief overview upon an multidisciplinary model developed by the University of Turin: this model implies the management of psychological care needs of both mesothelioma patients and their caregivers (with particular reference to malignant pleural mesothelioma – MPM) and it has been developed for the NCPS of Casale Monferrato (Italy), a place where mesothelioma incidence is over ten times higher than the national average [2].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Living with mesothelioma is a traumatic condition to deal with, strictly related with an intense fear of premature death, post-traumatic conditions, high levels of anxiety and depression, and despair [3-7]. From a psychological perspective, this kind of rare and fatal work-related cancer gives rise to confflictual affects very difficult to cope with and to elaborate (i.e. guilt, shame, revenge), with a huge cost for the psychological well-being of both patients and caregivers [8]. Under such circumstances, the emotional functioning of the subject is altered, roles change, and social ties and relationships are compromised [9,10].

Taking into account the subjective experience and the psychological wounds of patients and family members, as well as the national and international recommendation for the management of MPM [11,12] the University of Turin developed