

Quality of life and the level of knowledge and utilization of lymphedema prevention principles among mastectomized patients

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Breast cancer is the most prevalent female malignancy in Poland. Oncological treatment and its adverse effects diminish quality of life of breast cancer patients, which is determined by a number of somatic, psychological and social factors.

Purpose: To assess the quality of life and the level of knowledge and utilization of lymphedema prevention principles among women after surgical treatment of breast cancer.

Materials and methods: The study included 145 breast cancer patients after radical mastectomy. The respondents were examined with the validated EORTC QLQ-BR23 questionnaire and a custom-designed survey.

Results: Examination with the QLQ-BR23 questionnaire revealed that mastectomized women scored low on the body image scale. The most

frequently reported ailments were arm and breast symptoms. While the respondents showed high level of knowledge with regards to lymphedema prevention, they poorly adhered to the prophylactic guidelines. The participants were well aware of the risk factors of lymphedema, and most of them declared avoidance of their harmful effects.

Conclusions: Quality of life assessment should constitute an integral component of rehabilitation in every breast cancer patient, as mastectomy exerts significant effect on the outcome of perioperative period. Apart from specialist physiotherapy, also education of patients with regards to principles of lymphedema prevention and autotherapy constitutes an important component of complex management of lymphatic insufficiency.

Key words: Breast cancer, mastectomy, quality of life, lymphedema, prevention.
