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Factors associated with professional healthcare advice seeking in breast cancer-related lymphedema

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Objectives: Lymphoedema usually develops following axillary-lymph-node dissection. Approximately breast-cancer-related lymphoedema incidence was 15-30% and seemed to increase up to 2 years after diagnosis or surgery of breast cancer. This study aimed to identify cognitive factors associated with professional healthcare advice (PHCA) seeking behavior in breast cancer-related lymphedema.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey from January 2018 women with breast cancer who had undergone breast and lymph node surgery were recruited through the lymphedema specialty clinic. Participants with increased lymphedema risk (N=180) completed measures of lymphedema-related perceived risk including dissection number of axillary lymph node, radiation, body mass index, lymphedema symptom duration, an episode of cellulitis, duration of compliance to wear compression garments, and lymphedema knowledge scale. Cognitive and affective variables were reassessed at 3 and 6 months post-baseline.

Results: There were 180 patients with mean 64.3 ± 9.2 years, 51.1% patients have received surgery with 58.4 ± 18.6 years. There was no statistical difference between surgery and non-surgery ($p=0.8$). Maximum likelihood multilevel model analyses indicated that overall adherence increased over time, with significant differences between baseline and 3 and 6-month assessments in all patients ($p=0.03$). Quality of life significantly decreased in non-surgery group ($p=0.04$), and knowledge significantly increased over time in two groups ($p=0.03$ and 0.04 , respectively). Greater knowledge (OR=1.18, $p=0.01$), shorter symptom duration (OR=1.2, $p=0.03$), and less episode of cellulitis (OR=1.14, $p=0.01$) were associated with increased adherence to professional healthcare advice.

Conclusion: With or without surgery, early detection of lymphedema symptoms is vital for timely administration of effective treatments to manage these symptoms. Breast cancer survivors who received professional healthcare advice and understand lymphedema risk management are more likely to adhere to control lymphedema disease and improve quality of life.

Keywords: breast cancer related lymphedema, professional healthcare advice