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Importance of Second Opinion in Clinical Oncology

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Abstract:

During the past few decades cancer has become one of the most important causes of death after heart diseases in the world. The vast majority of cancer cases are from the developing and developed countries due to their wrong lifestyle choices. According to the World Health Organization, the database produced in the year 2012 revealed that every year approximately 14 million new cancer cases are registered and in the year 2015 around 8.8 million people lost their lives to cancer.

Status:

During the past few decades cancer has become one of the most important causes of death after heart diseases in the world. The vast majority of cancer cases are from the developing and developed countries due to their wrong lifestyle choices. According to the World Health Organization, the database produced in the year 2012 revealed that every year approximately 14 million new cancer cases are registered and in the year 2015 around 8.8 million people lost their lives to cancer.

The advancement of technology in the West makes cancer detection more accessible and hence the diagnosis of cancer at its early stage is more predictable but in the emergent countries like India, the cancer cases are diagnosed at its third or fourth stage where there is not much left to offer.

In the current scenario, different research institutes are pioneering in innovative treatment protocols for cancer cases. New medicinal formulations are being launched. Applications of stem cells are globally tried; new advanced surgeries like cyber knife and robotic surgeries are being performed. Advanced radiation techniques are recycled and also people are turning up from chemotherapy to immunotherapy. When the whole world is concentrating on the treatment of cancer with the different systems of medicines, still the majority of cancer population is suffering and dying due to cancer. And this is not the end of it as cancer patients and their families struggle to pay medical bills and are more likely to declare bankrupt. The

emotional turmoil leads to the stress and strain the patient goes through before and during the treatment which takes heavy toll on the patient and his family.

This vicious circle has devastating effects on the minds of the patient and the family. They are left confused and helpless. Finally different treatment choices are given and explained by the relatives, the physicians and some is gathered from the internet. With this turmoil in the mind the family is into dilemma what is to be done exactly? This situation clearly suggests the need of second opinion.

Cancer is a life threatening disease and therefore one should feel confident about the diagnosis and treatment plans. Therefore if any doubt arises one should be bold enough to ask doctor for a second opinion. Doctors are usually happy to help patients for a second opinion.

While treating thousands of patients we come across different suggestions given to patients regarding different treatment protocols. If one doctor says that this cancer is untreatable, another doctor may explore additional treatment options with the patient. There are always differences of opinions between the doctors regarding application of chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery. But more often chemotherapy is used with surgery or radiation therapy or both. Some doctors in case of chemotherapy might choose different drug combinations with different schedules. Naturally with these different opinions the patient is under dilemma and is unsure about what to do. He has lot many questions that needs appropriate explanations. That is why there is nothing to lose and everything to gain by getting a second opinion.

Cancer care often involves a group of collaborative opinions and it is always wise to be taken from different pathies too. This is due to the reality that every system of medicine has its own strength and limitations. Many a times the patient comes with many diggings like the cost benefit ratio, the risk benefit ratio and the positive and negative side effects of the treatment. If you talk to the average person on the street, especially in rural areas, they will often express a great fear about the devastating effects of cancer.

Chemotherapy causes long term side effects that do not go away. Some people do not feel comfortable right after chemotherapy. Loss of hair after chemotherapy and many more things can create depression and anxiety in women. Many women after one cycle of chemotherapy feel emotional distress and that is why they refuse to take chemotherapy. Triple negative breast cancer is one of the sub-types of breast cancer. This cancer can be more aggressive and difficult to treat in women. Also the cancer is more likely to spread and recur. Once the cancer metastasizes or spreads to lungs then 6 months survival chances are given to the patient. In such cases many questions roll in to the mind because they face physical, mental, social, job or financial problems related to their cancer experience. Same is with prostate cancer, there is no standard protocol for the treatment of this cancer. The patient has to spend huge amount and face to many side effects. These psycho-social and physical concerns may affect family members, friends and others who provide comfort and care to survivors. While treating such people the ultimate aim should be the life expectancy of patient based on the stage of the cancer and it should be individual based. By considering above thoughts again a second opinion is must.

In India, the diagnosis of cancer is confirmed quite late and 80% of the cancer is diagnosed in its advanced stage. At this stage because of the advancement of disease the doctor just cannot think of disease removal from its root cause but can give palliative cure. However scientifically speaking cancer cannot be cured from its root cause. But there is a stage in the body called disease free survival and keeping this concept in the mind the doctor can delay the recurrence of the cancer cells and give better Quality of Life to the patient.

Recently a survey was conducted in America and the cancer patients were asked where would they like to die whether at the hospital or at their homes? Surprisingly around 90% of the patients reported their wish to die at their homes. But unfortunately more than 60% of the patients had to die in the hospital ICU. The thought expressed here was that the whole lifetime they had spent with their family and those last moments of their lifetime patients could not spend with their family was the real regret. This particular aspect needs serious consideration and entire medical fraternity must pay attention to the wishes of cancer patients.

Many a times the cancer is diagnosed in its last stage. But at this time the patient and his family come with many expectations and in distress. Generally they express one common thought “Doctor if you cannot give healthy span of life to the patient then at least give him/her a peaceful death”.

Ayurveda thinks meticulously over this and proposes Quality of Life with longer span of life to cancer patients. Recently the American FDA has also approved Quality of Life as an important parameter and medicines are launched with “global awareness” worldwide based on this parameter. Contrary to this British Medical Journal has published an article saying that in the last five years 60 medicines were approved by Cancer Associations and these medicines have not shown any significant results or change in Quality of Life of cancer patients taking approved medicines.

As far as Ayurveda is concerned the treatment of the Cancer patient is well planned by taking into consideration the clinical status/needs of an individual patient. The whole concept of Ayurveda is for personalized medicines. Moreover at this juncture which system of medicine is more efficient does not contribute to the noble cause of treating a patient. Therefore it is strongly felt that the System of Medicines working collaboratively can give more fruitful results to the mankind. In this context Interpathy or Crosspathy needs extremely serious consideration. These pathies should collaboratively work together and make a treatment plan considering the disease progress and life of the patient is highly recommended.

Recommendation:

Finally it is observed that the patients tend to approach Ayurveda physicians whenever surgery is recommended. Of course the prominent thought in the mind of a patient is surgery can be avoided if opted for Ayurveda. Therefore it is strongly felt that the multi-pathy approach is the need of the hour for welfare of the cancer patients.