

Sources of Delay to a Penile Cancer Referral Centre in West Denmark

Introduction and Objective: Penile squamous cell carcinoma (pSCC) is a rare malignancy and patients turn up late for examination and treatment. We evaluate patient delay, pre-referral delay and tertiary centre delay in pSCC patients in West Denmark.

Materials and Methods: Patients with pSCC seen at our hospital from 1990 to 2009 with available referral history were identified. Data regarding reported time of first symptom, first visit to the first medical practitioner who evaluated the penile lesion (GP), diagnosis, and route of referral were retrieved from records. Patient delay was defined as the time between first symptom and first visit to the GP. Pre-referral delay was defined as time between first visit to the GP and referral to the tertiary centre. Tertiary centre delay was defined as the time between referral and initiation of definitive primary treatment for penile tumor and/or lymph node disease.

Results: Patients had visited 2.1 (1-6) different health care providers before referral to definitive primary treatment. Delay data were available for 149 out of 155 patients (96%), mean age was 65 years. Data on patient delay were available for 130 patients (84%). Mean patient delay was 187 days (0 – 1826 days). There were 49 patients (40%) who had more than 6 months patient delay. Data on pre-referral delay were available for 134 patients (90%). Mean pre-referral delay was 86 days (0 – 241 days). Thirteen patients (10%) had more than 6 months pre-referral delay. Data on tertiary centre delay were available for 149 patients (96%). Mean tertiary centre delay was 41 days (2 - 275). Mean total delay (patient delay + pre-referral delay + tertiary centre delay) could be calculated for 137 patients (88%) and was 319 days (32 – 2153 days). 81 (59%) and 39 (28%) patients had more than 6 and 12 months total delay respectively.

Conclusions: The major source of delay in pSCC is hesitance of patients to seek the health care system. Future studies should explore the reasons for patients to hesitate to seek medical help and aid development of information campaigns targeted to dermatologists, general practitioners and men in the age group at risk.