Fatigue in women treated for breast cancer compared with the general population

Purpose:
Fatigue after treatment for breast cancer (BC) is common. However, fatigue is also prevalent in people with chronic diseases (comorbidity). The aim was to compare the level of fatigue in relation to comorbidity in BC patients with the general Norwegian population (GenPop).

Methods:
Fatigue was measured by the subscale of the EORTC QLQ-C30 questionnaire, ranging from 0-100; a difference of 5-10 points defined as clinical meaningful. 248 patients were assessed five time points during the first year after radiotherapy (RT). Data from GenPop (N=652) was from a previous cross-sectional survey. Comorbidity was recorded by clinical examination in patients, and by self-report in GenPop. Analysis of covariance was applied to compare adjusted mean scores between groups.

Results:
Except for after ending RT, no significant differences in fatigue were found between BC patients and GenPop, adjusted for age and comorbidity. 23% of patients and 32% of GenPop had one or more of the following conditions; cardiovascular- or pulmonary disease, diabetes, or depression. Women with comorbidity were significant more fatigued than those without comorbidity, with a mean difference at 10.4 in BC patients and 13.3 in GenPop.

Conclusion:
Similar fatigue levels in BC patients and GenPop are promising, and may be explained by less side effects due to advancements in current treatment regimens. Fatigue after BC may be related to other conditions than the cancer – the impact of comorbidity is essential, and should always be considered when evaluating fatigue.

Figure 1:
Fatigue in BC patients during first year after RT, compared with GenPop.

Figure 2:
Fatigue in subgroups of comorbidity in patients at 12 months after RT and in GenPop.

Contact: E-mail: Randi.J.Reidunsdotter@hist.no