Nicotine dependence and smoking habits in patients with head and neck cancer

Objective: To assess smoking habits and nicotine dependence (ND) in patients with head and neck cancer.

Methods: This study involved 71 smokers or former smokers with squamous cell carcinoma in the oral cavity, pharynx, or larynx who were treated at a university hospital in the city of São Paulo between January and May of 2010. We used the Fagerström Test for Nicotine Dependence to evaluate smoking habits and ND in the sample. Data regarding cancer treatment were collected from medical records. Depending on the variables studied, we used the chi-square test, Fisher’s exact test, Student’s t-test, or Spearman’s correlation test.

Results: Of the 71 patients, 47 (66.2%) presented with high or very high ND, 40 (56.3%) smoked more than 20 cigarettes/day, and 32 (45.1%) smoked their first cigarette within 5 min of awakening. Advanced disease stage correlated significantly with the number of cigarettes smoked per day (p = 0.011) and with smoking history (p = 0.047). We found that ND did not correlate significantly with gender, disease stage, smoking cessation, or number of smoking cessation attempts, nor did the number of cigarettes smoked per day correlate with smoking cessation or gender. Treatment for smoking cessation was not routinely offered. Conclusions: In most of the patients studied, the level of ND was high or very high. The prevalence of heavy smoking for long periods was high in our sample. A diagnosis of cancer is a motivating factor for smoking cessation. However, intensive smoking cessation treatment is not routinely offered to smoking patients diagnosed with cancer.

Keywords: Head and neck neoplasms, Tobacco use disorder, Smoking cessation.

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