

The role of a primary care physician in screening for gastric cancer

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BACKGROUND

In Japan, malignant neoplasm is the most frequent cause of death and as gastric cancer has the highest morbidity, the health department have been encouraging screening test for gastric cancer for citizens over 40 years of age. For people under employment, the employers are required to provide periodical medical examination including cancer screening tests. Also after retirement, the local government provides a low cost medical examination and screening tests.

However the overall participation rate for gastric cancer is as low as 12%. The government plan, established in June of 2007, aims for increasing the participation rate to over 50%.

PURPOSE

To seek the role of primary care physician in a screening tests for gastric cancer.

PATIENTS AND METHODS

108 gastric cancer patients surgically treated at Nihon University Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital in the last 5 years were enrolled.

Members of the family, insurance policy, past history, the presence of a primary care physician and pathological staging of the gastric cancer were obtained from an oral, documental questionnaire and medical records.

Kai-square test, Wilcoxon test, ANOVA and logistic regression were used for statistical analysis and p-value <0.05 was considered to be significant.

RESULTS

The participation percentage of the medical examination and the screening test for gastric cancer was 47.2% and 26.9%, respectively.

Medical examination and gastric screening both contributed to early detection of gastric cancer. (P=0.0007, 0.001 respectively)

Patients with cohabiting spouse had high participation percentage of medical examination and gastric cancer screening (P=0.03, 0.03 respectively). The presence of a primary care physician had no significance.

Patients living with family members, especially a spouse, tend to be diagnosed in early stage of gastric cancer.

Having a primary care physician who treats underlying disease did not related to cancer stage.

CONCLUSION

The presence of a primary care physician does not improve the participation percentage of medical examination and gastric cancer screening.

It is possible that patients are more apt to receive medical examination or cancer screening tests with the encouragement of family members.

In order to increase the participation rate, it is important that a primary care physician should emphasize the necessity of medical examination and cancer screening tests to their patients.

Also the primary care physicians should acknowledge more the importance of managing each patient's general health care.

Also people with primary care physician is very rare in Japan. The majority of people usually consult a nearby physician, when they are symptomatic and in need of medical attention.