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Expectations vs. Reality: An Ongoing Prospective Study Evaluating Patient Expectations for Surgical Management of Metastatic Epidural Spinal Cord Compressions

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Keywords

Humans; Prospective Studies; Motivation; Longitudinal Studies; Communication; Patient-Centered Care; Referral and Consultation; Personal Satisfaction; Physicians; Neoplasms

Abstract

Many studies have highlighted how patients recall and retention of information post-consultation with physicians can misalign with the providers perceived expectations¹. This can lead to patients having inaccurate expectations of their outcomes following treatment. These inaccurate assumptions can be especially devastating in high stakes scenarios such as in the surgical management of metastatic epidural spine tumors.

This ongoing prospective study aims to explore the quality of communication between clinicians and six patients by using a longitudinal survey methodology where patients are surveyed prior to surgery and then post-operatively and two and six weeks. These surveys are then compared to look for differences between the expected outcome and the actual outcome. Results showed 100% of the patients had worse outcomes than they were expecting at two weeks after surgery. Of the 3 patients who do have data at the six-week mark, we still see that all their outcomes are worse than what they were expecting. Despite this misalignment of expectations and reality among patients, five out of the six patients were both satisfied with their spine tumor management and would choose the same management of their spine tumor again

These findings highlight the inherent optimism of patients, emphasizing the need to invest more energy in patient education and realistic outcome framing before surgery. By improving communication between patients and providers, we can potentially improve both treatment satisfaction and treatment adherence. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that effective patient-centered communication is pivotal to effective neurosurgical spine care and creates a more informed and engaged patient population.

References:

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