

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EDİTÖRE MEKTUP

Colorectal cancer and its epidemiological aspects in Iran (2004)

İran'da kolorektal kanser ve epidemiyolojisi (2004)

To the Editor,

Colorectal cancer is the most common problem involving the GI system, with a high mortality rate (1). Based on the reports of the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 87,500 new cases are diagnosed annually (2). The incidence of the disease is higher in the elderly; more than 90% of cases are older than 55 years of age (3). Incidence of the disease in younger patients is reported between 0.4% - 35.6% (3-5).

This study was designed retrospectively. Data from the patients referred to private and public health facilities between 2001 - 2004 with the diagnosis of colorectal cancer were included in the study. Data was obtained from treating physicians and medical record files. The data set included age, sex, education status, family history of cancer, and pathologic and colonoscopic findings. The gathered data was analyzed in SPSS statistical software using chi-square and t-test methods.

cases - 2.9%) and undifferentiated carcinoma (3 cases - 2.9%). Colon cancer and rectal cancer frequencies were 70.3% (71 cases) and 29.7% (30 cases), respectively. Of the colon cancer patients, 46.5% (47 cases) were left colon cancer, 17.8% (18 cases) right colon and 5.9% (6 cases) transverse colon (Table 1).

Twelve cases (66.7%) with right colon involvement were younger than 50 years, while 37 cases (78.7%) with left colon involvement were older than 50 ($p=0.0015$). The most common symptoms observed were abdominal pain (61 cases - 60.3%), constipation (58 cases - 54.7%) and rectal bleeding (37 cases - 36.6%) (Figure 1). Abdominal pain and rectal bleeding were the most common symptoms seen in right or left colon cancer (94.1%) and rectal cancers (94.1%). Anemia was more common in right colon cancer cases. Related family history

Table 1. Distribution of involved sites and sex distribution in colorectal cancer patients

	Right colon		Transverse colon		Left colon		Rectum		TOTAL	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	12	19,7	5	8,7	27	44,3	17	27,9	61	100
Female	6	15	1	2,5	20	50	13	32,5	40	100
TOTAL	18	17,8	6	5,9	47	46,6	30	29,7	101	100

Total number of patients included in the study was 101, of whom 61 (60.4%) were male and 40 (39.6%) female. Mean age was 56 ± 13.65 . Fourteen (13.9%) patients were younger than 40 years of age. Histopathologic diagnoses of the patients were adenocarcinoma (95 cases - 94%), lymphoma (3

was documented in 19 cases younger than 50 (51.4%) and in 17 older than 50 (26.6%) ($p=0.022$) (Table 2).

O'Connell and coworkers had reported three younger patients (under 40 years) with colorectal cancer, to account for 2.1% of cases in a 25-year

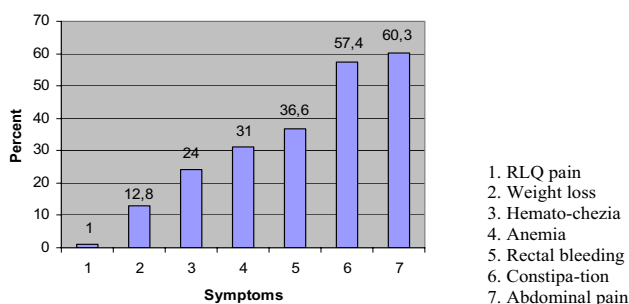


Figure 1. Symptoms in patients with colorectal cancer

period (4). According to results of the present study, colorectal cancer is a disease with a mean age below 60 years. 13.9% of patients were younger than 40 years.

Slattery and colleagues mentioned that the presence of a family history might act as a risk factor among patients younger than 50 years of age (6). Family history of cancer was evident in 30% of our cases and 16.7% of the patients had colorectal can-

Table 2. Diagnosis of age and related family history in colorectal cancer cases

	Age <50	Age >50	Total
Fam. History (+)	19*	17	36
Fam. History (-)	18	47*	65
Total	37	64	101

*P = 0,0220

cer history in their relatives. Based on our results, the screening for colorectal cancer in relatives of colorectal cancer patients should be established.

In conclusion, this retrospective study in 101 patients with colon cancer in Iran suggests that: (i) although the malignancy presents with the nonspecific symptoms of abdominal pain, a similar number present with either rectal hemorrhage or hematochezia, thus symptoms specific for the colon; (ii) patients with right colon involvement are younger than patients with left colon involvement; and (iii) history of colon cancer is observed especially in younger patients (<50 years of age) with colon cancer.

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