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Audit of Follow-Up Practices and Recurrence Detection in Head and Neck Cancer Patients at BHRUT

Background

Follow-up after head and neck cancer treatment is essential for detecting recurrence and managing long-term sequelae. Current recommendations are follow-up every 2 months for the first 2 years, and every 3–6 months during years 3–5. However, there is limited research on optimal frequency of follow-up. This audit assessed compliance with these recommendations, recurrence detection and implications for resource use.

Methods

A retrospective audit was conducted of 67 patients treated for head and neck cancer between March 2016 and August 2024. Data collected included number and timing of follow-up appointments, recurrence rates, site of recurrence, and method of detection (routine surveillance vs unscheduled presentation). Results The average number of follow-up appointments per patient was 2.35 in year 1, 1.95 in year 2, 1.88 in year 3, 1.45 in year 4, and 1.33 in year 5, below guideline recommendations. Recurrence occurred in 4 patients (6%): two laryngeal, one oropharyngeal, and one nasopharyngeal cancer. All recurrences were detected within the first 2 years during routine surveillance appointments, consistent with literature suggesting most recurrences present with symptoms.

Conclusions

Despite not meeting guidelines, all recurrences were detected early, highlighting the importance of surveillance in the first 2 years. Given that each outpatient appointment costs the NHS ~£200, these findings support targeted follow-up strategies and patient-initiated follow-up (PIFU) beyond 2 years. AI-driven patient-led symptom monitoring may further optimise PIFU, enabling timely detection of symptomatic recurrences while reducing unnecessary visits. Further research with multi-centre cohorts is required to validate these findings, refine follow-up frequency, and evaluate cost-effectiveness.

Biography

Dr. Siddharth Kotikalapudi is a dedicated medical professional currently practicing within the NHS, where he contributes to high-quality patient care through strong clinical expertise and a commitment to continuous professional development. He is involved in delivering evidence-based medical services and actively supports multidisciplinary collaboration to ensure the best outcomes for patients. Dr. Kotikalapudi maintains a keen interest in advancing his clinical skills and engages in ongoing training, case discussions, and academic activities within his department. Known for his professionalism, compassionate approach, and strong work ethic, he is valued by both colleagues and patients alike.

He continues to enhance his knowledge through participation in conferences, workshops, and research-oriented initiatives, reflecting his dedication to the evolving landscape of modern healthcare. Dr. Kotikalapudi remains focused on contributing meaningfully to medical practice while upholding the highest standards of clinical excellence.