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Awareness and Practice of Adherence to COVID-19 Preventive Behaviours of Patients with Cancer at National Cancer Institute, Sri Lanka

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Background: COVID-19 is a global pandemic and strict preventive measures were introduced with the rapid spread of infection. The risk of infection is high among patients with cancers due to low immunity and disease manifestation. Adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures is vital to reduce complications and improve the survival rate of patients with cancer.

Objectives: To assess awareness and practice of adherence to COVID-19 preventive behaviours among patients with cancers at the National Cancer Institute, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among randomly selected 422 adult patients with cancers attending the National Cancer Institute, Sri Lanka for treatment. Data were collected using a pre-tested, interviewer-administered questionnaire based on demographic data, awareness, and practice of adherence to COVID-19 preventive behaviors. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0.

Results: Mean (SD) age of participants is 50.2 ($\pm$15.5) years. The majority (75.6%) were female, Sinhalese (79.1%), and educated above the G.C.E. A/L (45.0%). Highly prevalent cancer types in the sample were breast (24.2%), gastrointestinal (17.5%), head and neck (13.7%) and lung (8.1%) cancers and 32.5% represent 1st stage of cancer. Chemotherapy (42.2%), radiotherapy (23.5%) and surgery 73 (17.3%) were the main treatment methods. The majority (98.1%) shows a good level of awareness and practice (77.3%) of adherence to COVID-19 preventive behaviours. While the level of awareness was associated with gender (p=0.011) and types of cancer (p<0.001), the level of practice was associated with gender (p=0.021), marital status (p=0.003), religion (p<0.001), nationality (p=0.002), education level (p<0.001), stage of cancer (p=0.035), and treatment method (p=0.003).

Conclusions: Awareness and practice of adherence to COVID-19 preventive behaviours are satisfactory among patients with cancers. Strategies need to be taken to continue to maintain safe behaviour to minimize the risk of getting coronavirus infection.

Keywords: Awareness, Cancer patients, COVID-19 preventive behaviours, Practice