Review

Squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck in the elderly

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Abstract

The incidence of head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSCC) peaks between the fifth and seventh decades of life. With prolongation of life expectancy, however, the proportion of elderly HNSCC patients is also increasing, which makes HNSCC in this life period an important issue for healthcare providers. With features characteristic to the older patient groups coupled with the inherent complexity of the disease, HNSCC in the elderly represents a considerable challenge to clinicians. Indeed, to expedite the progress and improve the healthcare system to meet the needs of this unique population of patients, several essential issues related to the clinical profile, diagnostics, optimal treatment and support are of concern and should be addressed in properly conducted clinical trials.

In the present review, we analyzed a literature series comparing different age groups with regard to their clinical characteristics, therapy, outcome and quality of life in an attempt to determine their implications on treatment-decision-making for elderly patients with HNSCC.

Keywords

Head and neck cancer; Elderly; Geriatric assessment; Radiotherapy; Surgery; Systemic therapy