Experiences of People with Cancer of the Unknown Primary: What do we know and what do we need to do?

The Australian Perspective

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AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgements: Project support- Cancer Australia and Cancer Council NSW
People support- Schofield: NHMRC Fellowship CDA level II
CUP in Australia

- In 2007, 8\textsuperscript{th} most common cancer and 9\textsuperscript{th} most common cause of death
- In 2003, 7\textsuperscript{th} most common cancer and 3\textsuperscript{rd} most common cause of death
Presentation with metastatic disease

Initial clinical and pathological evaluation

Primary site not found

Additional directed clinical/pathological evaluation

Primary site not found

Favourable CUP subset not identified

One primary site not suspected

Empiric treatment

One primary site suspected but not confirmed

Site-specific treatment

Primary site found anatomically

Site-specific therapy

Primary site found anatomically

Favourable CUP subset

Specific treatment for subset

Complex and arduous illness trajectory
Health professional perspective

“The under-supported cancers, they often feel neglected when they see the sea of pink. This is raising them up so people know about them. Providing support when there is none. For the unknown primary, it’s raising that it exists, and validating that it’s a real form of cancer.”

Gill Batt, Director, Cancer Information and Support Services, Cancer Council NSW
Consumer perspective

“It’s like having a child go missing, in the end the NOT KNOWING is worse than if they had of died. There is no closure and CUP is exactly the same. It’s psychological torture. My father felt this and many patients I’ve cared for whilst we are biopsying this or that have said that’s how they are feeling.”

Cindy Bryant, bereaved carer and nurse
What do we know about the experience of CUP?

- Extensive literature search revealed virtually no quality of life research and limited clinical research on CUP.
CUP Psychosocial Unmet Needs Study (CUP-PSUN Study)

Principle Investigator: Helen Gooden

Mixed method study

• Qualitative telephone interview: Thematic analysis utilising NVivo9®

• Quantitative surveys post interview
  – Patients: psychological distress, quality of life, unmet needs (HADS; BSI; EORTC-QLQ; SCNS)
  – Caregivers: psychological distress, quality of life, unmet needs, self-efficacy (BSI; SCNS; CASES)
Participant recruitment

Eligibility
• Diagnosis of CUP
• Caregiver for person with CUP (current or bereaved)

Recruitment
• Opt-in via Cancer Council Helplines and clinician referral
• 15 expressions of interest from Dec to April
• To date: N= 5 patients N=5 carers
• Response rates 10/12 = 84%
The experiences of people with CUP

Difficulty understanding diagnosis

“How can you have a cancer without a primary? I mean it was just so extraordinary, so bizarre!” Patient, Female

Difficulty of living with “uncertainty”

“It’s the isolation, the fear, the not-knowing that gnaws away at you.” Patient, Female
The experiences of people with CUP

Uncertainty regarding treatment

“(Dr) said, while we are filling you up with all these chemo poisons, the cancer is just laughing at us.” Patient, Male

“I thought, God, is it worse to find the primary or not find it.” Patient, Female

Feeling lost and abandoned

“Because there was nothing, I just stopped expecting anything.” Patient, Female
Clinician Survey

Investigators: A/Prof Chris Karapetis and Helen Gooden

Aim: To determine clinical practices in approach to management of CUP amongst Australian medical oncologists

Design: Cross-sectional survey design using an electronically completed questionnaire administered via email

Participants: National membership of Medical Oncologists of Australia (MOGA) N= 86; Response rate= 28% (86/302)
## Sample characteristics

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Cancer of Unknown Primary Clinician Survey

Are you prepared to provide a final diagnosis of CUP if you remain uncertain as to the primary location of the cancer?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

68
16
98% of respondents DID NOT believe that all CUP cancers are the same entity.
Cancer of Unknown Primary Clinician Survey

Do you provide a possible primary location of the cancer in an effort to obtain PBS funded drugs for your patient with CUP, e.g. diagnose lung cancer to comply with the PBS when your actual diagnosis is CUP?

No - 15
Yes - 71
At your institution do you have treatment protocols (e.g. accepted chemotherapy regimens) that are recommended specifically for CUP?

Yes: 33
No: 53
Do you apply a specific classification system when you diagnose CUP?

- Yes: 2
- No: 78
- If Yes - please provide details of the classification system, e.g. ICD: 5
How do you describe or discuss a diagnosis with patients and families?

Use term CUP and explain
“Primary (parent) appears to have regressed but metastases (children) have grown”

Don’t use term CUP; discuss likely primary
“No don’t use CUP; Usually talk about my best guess primary”

Discuss poor prognosis:
“Whilst we can offer chemotherapy, it is not curable and prognosis is often in the realm of months rather than years”

Treatment implications
“I use the term of CUP and explain that it is a well recognised situation. Treatment is guided by the histology and overall clinical picture/pattern of disease”

Recognised Common Cancer type
“I inform them that it is a legitimate, recognised entity in our specialty.”
Future Research Directions

• Establish comprehensive longitudinal description of supportive care needs of people affected by CUP

• Develop and test acceptable, clinically feasible and sustainable intervention targeting these needs
SUPER: Patient Reported Outcomes

**Aims**
To establish the quality of life and psychosocial needs of patients with CUP compared to a matched sample of patients with metastatic cancer of a known primary

**Design**
A prospective, longitudinal study with matched control group over one year with 120 cases per group. Data collection will occur 3 monthly.

**Measures**
- Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale
- EORTC Quality of Life Questionnaire Core Questionnaire
- Needs Assessment for Advanced Cancer Patient
- Memorial Symptom Assessment Scale Short Form
- Hopelessness Assessment in Illness
Research Challenges

CUP patients are a sizable group of patients with unique and complex needs.

There is virtually no evidence to guide communication or supportive care practices.

- Difficulties in defining and identifying these patients within the system.
- Many doctors provide a ‘likely’ diagnosis, so patients don’t identify with CUP label.
- Maybe recorded as a definitive diagnosis to access drugs.
- Poor prognosis means research is challenging.