



Cancer Susceptibility in Females Exposed to Diethylstilboestrol during Foetal Development

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Abstract

Vaginal cancer is a rare and often misunderstood gynecological malignancy that originates in the cells of the vagina. The vagina is a muscular tube connecting the external genitals to the uterus, and while it is a relatively infrequent site for cancer development compared to other gynecological cancers, it can have a significant impact on women's health when diagnosed. This introduction provides an overview of vaginal cancer, covering its risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment options, and the importance of awareness and early detection. Vaginal cancer is associated with several risk factors, although the exact cause is not always clear. These risk factors may include a history of human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, smoking, a weakened immune system, and exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) in utero.

Keywords: Diethylstilboestrol (DES); Human papillomavirus

Introduction

Vaginal cancer can present various symptoms, which may include abnormal vaginal bleeding (especially post-menopausal bleeding), vaginal discharge that may be bloody or have an unusual odor, pain during sexual intercourse, and pelvic pain. Awareness of these symptoms is crucial for early diagnosis. The diagnosis of vaginal cancer involves a thorough medical evaluation. This typically includes a pelvic examination, a biopsy of suspicious tissue, and imaging studies such as MRI or CT scans to determine the extent of the cancer. Vaginal cancer can be categorized into different types based on the type of cells involved. The most common type is squamous cell carcinoma, followed by adenocarcinoma and other rare subtypes. Staging is essential to determine the extent of the cancer's spread.

Discussion

Vaginal cancer stages range from I (confined to the vaginal lining) to IV (spread to distant organs). Staging guides treatment decisions. Treatment for vaginal cancer depends on the stage, location, and type of cancer. Common treatment modalities include surgery to remove the tumor, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and sometimes a combination of these approaches. Treatment plans are individualized based on the patient's specific condition. The prognosis for vaginal cancer varies widely based on the stage at diagnosis. When detected at an early stage, the outlook is generally more favorable. Regular follow-up care is important to monitor for recurrence. Reducing the risk of vaginal cancer involves safe sexual practices, HPV vaccination, smoking cessation, and early detection through regular gynecological examinations. Public awareness campaigns play a vital role in educating women about the disease and its risk factors. In conclusion, vaginal cancer, though rare, is a serious condition that can impact women's health and quality of life. Early detection and timely intervention are critical for improved outcomes. Increased awareness, preventive measures, and ongoing research are essential in the fight against vaginal cancer and its effects on women's well-being. Certainly, let's delve into a discussion on vaginal cancer, a relatively rare but important gynecological cancer that warrants attention and understanding. Vaginal cancer is uncommon compared to other gynecological cancers like cervical or ovarian cancer. Due to its rarity, it may not receive as much attention in terms of public awareness and research funding. This underscores the importance of increasing awareness about the

disease and its risk factors to facilitate early detection and effective management. Vaginal cancer is a rare type of cancer that begins in the cells of the vagina, the muscular tube that connects the external genitals to the uterus. It accounts for approximately 1-2% of all gynecological cancers. Vaginal cancer can occur at any age but is most commonly diagnosed in women over the age of 50 [1-4].

Several risk factors are associated with vaginal cancer, including a history of HPV infection, smoking, a weakened immune system, and exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) in utero. Understanding these risk factors is crucial for identifying individuals at higher risk and implementing preventive measures. HPV infection is a significant risk factor for vaginal cancer, particularly in younger women. The availability of HPV vaccines provides an opportunity for primary prevention. Widespread vaccination can reduce the incidence of HPV-related cancers, including vaginal cancer, in future generations. Vaginal cancer can be challenging to diagnose due to its rarity and the overlap of symptoms with other gynecological conditions. Delayed diagnosis can impact treatment outcomes. Healthcare providers need to be vigilant in considering vaginal cancer in the differential diagnosis when patients present with relevant symptoms. Treatment for vaginal cancer varies based on factors such as the stage, type, and location of the tumor. Surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and a combination of these modalities may be employed. Treatment plans must be tailored to the individual patient's circumstances. A diagnosis of vaginal cancer can have a profound psychosocial impact on patients and their families. Coping with the emotional and physical challenges associated with cancer treatment is a critical aspect of care. Survivorship care is essential for individuals who have undergone

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treatment for vaginal cancer. Regular follow-up visits are necessary to monitor for recurrence and manage potential long-term side effects of treatment. Continued research into the underlying causes of vaginal cancer, as well as advancements in treatment options and early detection methods, is crucial. Collaborative efforts among healthcare professionals, researchers, and advocacy groups can drive progress in this area. Support networks and advocacy organizations play a vital role in providing resources, information, and emotional support to individuals and families affected by vaginal cancer. These groups can help raise awareness and advocate for research funding. In conclusion, while vaginal cancer is rare, it is a significant health concern that requires attention from the medical community, policymakers, and the public. Enhanced awareness, prevention through vaccination and risk factor reduction, early diagnosis, and improved treatment options are essential elements in addressing vaginal cancer and improving outcomes for those affected by this condition. Vaginal cancer is a complex disease with several theories and hypotheses regarding its development. While the exact cause of vaginal cancer remains incompletely understood, various theories have been proposed to provide insights into the potential mechanisms and risk factors associated with this cancer [5-7].

Here are some key theories on vaginal cancer:

HPV infection theory: Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is a well-established risk factor for vaginal cancer, particularly in younger women. This theory posits that persistent infection with high-risk HPV types can lead to changes in vaginal cells, eventually leading to cancer development. HPV vaccines have been developed to prevent HPV infection and reduce the risk of associated cancers, including vaginal cancer.

Smoking and environmental exposures: Smoking tobacco is a recognized risk factor for several types of cancer, including vaginal cancer. The theory here suggests that carcinogens in tobacco smoke may reach the vaginal tissue and initiate cancerous changes. Additionally, exposure to environmental toxins or chemicals may contribute to cancer development in some cases.

Des exposure theory: Diethylstilbestrol (DES) is a synthetic estrogen that was prescribed to some pregnant women between the 1940s and 1970s. Daughters of women who took DES during pregnancy have an increased risk of developing vaginal cancer. The theory is that in utero exposure to DES may lead to genetic and cellular changes in the vaginal tissue, increasing susceptibility to cancer later in life.

Immunosuppression theory: A weakened immune system, often associated with conditions like HIV/AIDS or immunosuppressive medications, can increase the risk of vaginal cancer. This theory suggests that a compromised immune response may fail to control the growth of abnormal cells in the vaginal tissue.

Hormonal factors: Hormonal influences on vaginal cancer risk are less clear than for some other gynecological cancers. Nevertheless, hormonal changes, such as those occurring during menopause or with the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), have been explored as potential risk factors.

Genetic predisposition: Genetic factors may play a role in some cases of vaginal cancer. Specific genetic mutations or family history of gynecological cancers could increase the likelihood of developing vaginal cancer.

Inflammation and immune response: Chronic inflammation

within the vaginal environment may contribute to the development of vaginal cancer. This theory suggests that long-term inflammatory conditions may lead to genetic mutations and the progression of cancer.

It's important to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive, and vaginal cancer likely results from a combination of factors, including genetic, environmental, hormonal, and infectious influences. Ongoing research aims to further our understanding of the precise mechanisms and interactions that lead to the development of vaginal cancer. This knowledge is essential for improving prevention, early detection, and treatment strategies for this relatively rare but significant gynecological cancer [8].

Conclusion

Ongoing research is crucial to better understand the causes and mechanisms of vaginal cancer. Public awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts are vital for promoting early detection, prevention, and research funding. Holistic care that addresses the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of patients is essential in the management of vaginal cancer. A multidisciplinary approach involving healthcare providers, support networks, and advocacy organizations is key. In conclusion, vaginal cancer, though rare, is a complex and significant health issue. Enhancing awareness, preventing HPV infection through vaccination, addressing risk factors like smoking, and improving early detection and treatment options are essential steps in reducing the burden of vaginal cancer and improving the well-being of those affected by this condition. Continued research is imperative to advance our understanding and management of vaginal cancer and to provide hope for improved outcomes and quality of life for patients.

Acknowledgment

None

Conflict of Interest

None

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