Fatigue and menopausal symptoms in women with breast cancer undergoing hormonal cancer treatment

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BACKGROUND: Hormonal treatment for women with breast cancer is frequently proposed in the adjuvant as well as in the palliative setting. Therefore, many women are confronted with early menopause and prolonged oestrogen deprivation and consequently with a variety of quality of life issues, such as menopausal symptoms and fatigue. PATIENTS AND METHODS: It was the aim of this study to explore the occurrence and frequency of menopausal symptoms in women with breast cancer, undergoing hormonal cancer treatment and to investigate their relationship with fatigue. A cross-sectional, quantitative approach was used in this multi-centre study. The Checklist for Patients with Endocrine Therapy (C-PET) and the International Breast Cancer Study Group (IBCSG) Linear Analogue Scales for patients with endocrine treatment were used. Descriptive statistics, as well as cluster analyses were performed. RESULTS: Most frequent menopausal symptoms involved hot flashes/sweats, tiredness, weight gain, vaginal dryness and decreased sexual interest. There were significant differences between the fatigued and the non-fatigued population regarding the intensity of menopausal symptoms, emotional irritability and general coping. Cluster analyses supported a menopausal symptom cluster. CONCLUSIONS: Fatigue accompanies menopausal symptoms and an association can be expected. Methods for routine screening for menopausal symptoms, including fatigue, are suggested as a relevant research issue in women with breast cancer undergoing hormonal treatment.