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ABSTRACT

Perceived Barriers to Early Presentation and Symptom-specific Time to Seek Medical Advice for Possible Lung Cancer Symptoms: A Cross-sectional Study from Palestine

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Background: Lung cancer (LC) has poor survival outcomes mainly due to diagnosis at late stages. This study explored the time needed to consult medical advice for possible LC symptoms and barriers to early presentation in Palestine.

Objectives: This study aimed to (i) describe the time interval to seek medical advice for a possible LC signs/symptoms, (ii) examine the association between LC signs/symptoms awareness and the anticipated time to seek medical advice, and (iii) identify the barriers for early presentation and their association with LC signs/symptoms awareness.

Methods: This cross-sectional study recruited adult participants from hospitals, primary healthcare centers, and public spaces of 11 governorates using convenience sampling. A modified, translated-into-Arabic version of the validated LC awareness measure was used to assess LC symptom awareness, the time needed to seek medical advice and barriers to early presentation.

Results: A total of 4762 participants were included. The proportion that would immediately seek medical advice for possible LC symptoms varied based on symptoms' nature. For respiratory symptoms, this ranged from 15.0% for 'painful cough' to 37.0% for 'coughing up blood'. For non-respiratory symptoms, this ranged from 4.2% for 'unexplained loss of appetite' to 18.2% for



‘unexplained loud, high-pitched sound when breathing’. Participants with good LC symptom awareness were more likely to seek medical advice within a week of recognizing most of LC symptoms. About 13.0% would delay their visit to see a doctor after recognizing a LC symptom. The most reported barriers were emotional with ‘disliking the visit to healthcare facilities’ (59.8%) as the leading barrier.

Conclusion: Respiratory symptoms of LC were more likely to prompt early seeking of medical advice. Good awareness of LC symptom was associated with higher likelihood of help-seeking within a week. Educational interventions are needed to promote LC awareness and address the perceived barriers to early presentation in the Palestinian community.

Keywords: Lung cancer, awareness, early presentation, barriers, early diagnosis, Palestine.