

Research Article

A study of awareness and knowledge about cataract among students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Cataract can cause visual dysfunction ranging from mild to severe loss of vision. The rate of development of senile cataract is generally slow and the vision loss is usually gradual but can result in blindness if treatment is delayed. The main objective was to study the awareness about cataract among students (non-medical).

Methods: A questionnaire based study was conducted among 430 students (non-medical). The questions tested their awareness about cataract and also about the potential ocular complications of the disease and the treatments available currently.

Results: 65.81% (283/430) have heard about cataract. 50 students out of 283 students were aware about the basic facts about cataract. The rest 233 students have just heard of the term cataract. Overall only 11.62% (50/430) were aware about the basic facts about cataract. 34.10% (147/430) was not aware about cataract.

Conclusions: The awareness of one of the leading cause of treatable blindness like cataract is low among students. Steps should be taken to increase the awareness about cataract and also about the various treatment options available for cataract. More focus should be on cataract in health education programmes.

Keywords: Cataract awareness, Students, Non-medical

INTRODUCTION

The most common causes of blindness and vision impairment worldwide are cataract, glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, trachoma and uncorrected refractive error.¹⁻⁴

Cataract can cause visual dysfunction ranging from mild to severe loss of vision. The rate of development of senile cataract is generally slow and the vision loss is usually gradual but can result in blindness if treatment is delayed.

According to the World Health Report published in 1998 by WHO, the estimated blindness from cataract were 19.34 million which represented about 43% of the blindness worldwide.⁵ According to the recent assessment, cataract is responsible for 51% of world blindness, which represents about 20 million people. The

number is increasing and it is expected to increase further due to increase in population especially the elderly population. The increased life expectancy because of better healthcare and other factors has led to an increase in population of the elderly, thereby increasing the prevalence of senile cataract.

Despite being the leading cause of treatable blindness, the lack of awareness about the disease and its treatment is still a major hurdle in decreasing the blindness due to cataract in the developing countries especially in the rural areas.

We conducted a survey among students from non-medical background to assess their level of awareness about cataract.

METHODS

A questionnaire based study was conducted among 430 non-medical students. The questionnaire tested the basic knowledge about cataract. The questions were simple and direct. Most of the questions were closed ended (Appendix 1). The students were chosen because they are young and the prevalence of cataract is going to increase among them in the future. Also if they are aware they can encourage and motivate the elderly people at home to seek treatment if they have visual problems due to cataract.

RESULTS

65.81% (283/430) have heard about cataract. 50 students out of 283 students were aware about the basic facts about cataract. The rest 233 students did not know that it was a commonest cause of blindness and it can be easily removed and full vision restored. They did not know that cataract was done free in government hospitals and NGO based hospitals. Overall only 11.62% (50/430) were aware about the basic facts about cataract. 34.10% (147/430) was not aware about cataract (Figure 1).

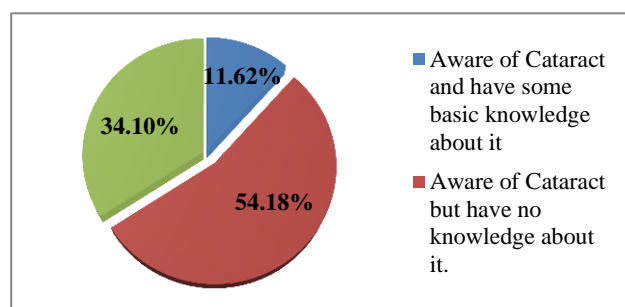


Figure 1: Awareness of cataract among students.

DISCUSSION

The incidence and prevalence of age related cataract is increasing worldwide. In developing countries the lack of awareness of cataract and the treatment options available is one of important factor for the increased prevalence of cataract. In one study it has been estimated that in India alone 3.8 million people become blind from cataract each year.⁶ In developing countries like India, studies have shown that incidence of cataract is high and occurs earlier in life.^{7,8} In India prevalence of visual defect and blindness caused by cataract is high, even though cataract surgery with intraocular lens implantation is offered free of cost to the patient through government and non-government voluntary organization.

Despite counselling some patient refuses to get treated because of their fear of surgery and other misconceptions about it.

In our study the level of awareness among the non-medical students was low. Steps should be taken to

increase the awareness about cataract and the treatment options available among students. Studies have shown that not much of importance is given in media to health education with respect to eye, except those related to refractive surgeries and contact lenses.⁹ By increasing the knowledge about cataract among the young population, they will act as counsellors at home motivating and encouraging the elderly relatives and friends about cataract and the availability of safe treatment for cataract.

CONCLUSION

The awareness of one of the leading cause of treatable blindness like cataract is low among students. Steps should be taken to increase the awareness about cataract and also about the various treatment options available for cataract. More focus should be on cataract in health education programmes.

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Appendix 1: Sample Questions from Questionnaire

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|--|--------|
| 1. Have you heard of the term Cataract? | Yes/No |
| 2. If yes, do you know it is a disease of the eye? | Yes/No |
| 3. Do you know that if left untreated it can cause blindness? | Yes/No |
| 4. Do you know that vision could be fully restored by surgery? | Yes/No |
| 5. Do you know that the surgery is done free of cost in govt and many private Hospitals? | Yes/No |