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The Psychological Impact of Facial Skin Cancer

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Non-melanoma skin cancers are generally considered to have a low mortality & little impact on quality of life (QoL).

80% of non-melanoma skin cancers occur in the head and neck.

Thus both the skin cancer and the scars following surgical excision are conspicuously placed in a cosmetically sensitive area.

Facial disfigurement results in anxiety, depression and social isolation.

The severity of this often bears little relationship to the magnitude of the defect itself.
This study was designed to quantify the social, emotional and aesthetic impact of facial skin cancers on patients before and after surgical excision.

53 patients were prospectively recruited.

Patients were assessed before and three months after surgery using the Skin Cancer Index (SCI)*.

This is a 15 item, disease-specific, quality of life assessment tool which measures three distinct subscales: emotion, social and appearance.

Higher scores reflect an improvement in QoL.

Surgical excision led to a significant improvement in both the total SCI score (from 70.0 to 82.4, \( p < 0.001 \)) and in each of the individual sub-scale scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skin Cancer Index</th>
<th>Pre-surgery mean SCI (SD)</th>
<th>Post-surgery mean SCI (SD)</th>
<th>Change in mean SCI (SD)</th>
<th>( p ) value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total SCI score</td>
<td>70.0 (25.3)</td>
<td>82.4 (18.4)</td>
<td>12.4 (17.4)</td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional score</td>
<td>66.6 (27.1)</td>
<td>77.6 (20.0)</td>
<td>11.0 (17.6)</td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social score</td>
<td>75.5 (28.3)</td>
<td>85.7 (23.1)</td>
<td>10.2 (26.3)</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance score</td>
<td>68.7 (34.3)</td>
<td>85.2 (23.1)</td>
<td>16.5 (27.7)</td>
<td>(&lt;0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results - Breakdown

• SCI scores in patients with SCCs improved over 3 times more than those in patients with BCCs (p=0.016)

• Age, gender, scar length & method of wound closure did not have a significant impact on change in overall SCI score

• Increasing age correlated with a greater improvement in SCI following surgery

• Women showed greater improvement than men in the appearance & emotional subscales

• Men improved more in the social subscale
Conclusions

- Surgical excision improves social, emotional & cosmetic wellbeing in patients with cutaneous facial malignancies
- This improvement is most evident in patients with SCCs
- Female & younger patients are most vulnerable to quality of life anxieties pre-operatively