

“Didn't think it could be cancer”: What Do Parents of Children with CNS Tumors Say About Barriers to Seeking Medical Care at Symptom Onset?

Natália Dassi^{1,2}, Andrea M Cappellano¹, Fabiola Isabel S de Sousa², Rosana Puccini²,
Nasjla Saba da Silva¹, Maria Wany Louzada Strufaldi²

¹Department of Pediatric Oncology IOP-GRAACC-Federal University of Sao Paulo;

² Department of Pediatrics' Federal University of Sao Paulo

Introduction:

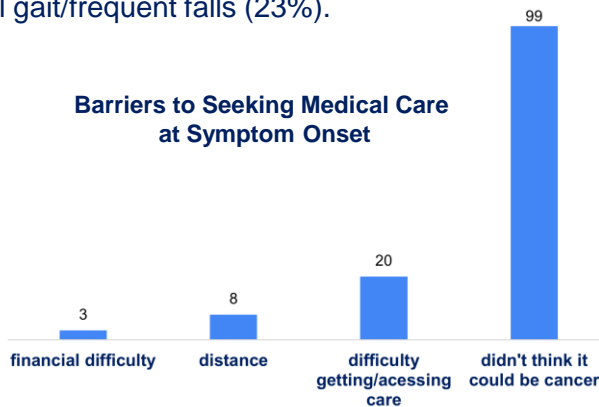
- Pediatric brain tumors often have a **longer interval to diagnosis** compared to other pediatric malignancies due to no pathognomonic/non-specific signs and symptoms that are common to other pediatric illnesses.
- **Patient (parental) interval** is defined as the interval between symptom onset and initial presentation to a healthcare professional.
- A limited knowledge of signs/symptoms of the disease is associated with parental lag-times.

Aim: To assess factors reported by parents of children with CNS tumors as barriers to seeking medical attention at the onset of their children's symptoms related to the tumor diagnosis.

Methods: Cross-sectional study; application of questionnaires to parents of children with CNS tumors treated at a single center.

Results:

- **One hundred parents** participated in the study;
- The mean parental interval were 58.1 days;
- The most frequent symptoms reported by them that motivated seeking medical attention were morning and/or persistent vomiting (49%), followed by headache (43%) and abnormal gait/frequent falls (23%).



Conclusion:

- Understanding the factors associated with the parental interval for the diagnosis of CNS pediatric brain tumors is crucial for improving the time to diagnosis.
- In our study, the most significant barrier reported by parents was “didn't think it could be cancer,” indicating a **low awareness of the alarm signs for brain tumors**.
- This underscores the need for targeted interventions, as parental education is a modifiable factor that could significantly reduce diagnostic delays.