complications in medical treatments revealed in retrospect: should the public be alert?
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introduction

one of the topics on health system’s agenda concerns actions required in response to complications discovered in retrospect in previously legitimate medical treatments: is there a responsibility to inform the public? and how should it be conducted in order to prevent the public’s anxiety?
countries are increasingly dealing with such scenarios.
some of which are causing public reactions, such as complications discovered in drugs that were taken off the market; complications appearing with treatments previously thought to be safe; and specific cases in certain countries, such as nasopharyngeal radium irradiation (nri) treatments administered in u.s.a to naval personnel and children during 1940s-1960s for ear infections and other conditions, causing public anxiety when a link to cancer was established.
such scenarios are expected to increase following improvements in medical technology and the genetic field, increasing sensitivity to risks in ongoing treatments.

the study focuses on such case: irradiation treatments received routinely until 1960 for ringworm of the scalp, linked during 1970s to various kinds of cancer, causing public reaction in israel. examining the notification aspect in this affair, the study aims to suggest a generic model for communicating the public on risks in treatments discovered in retrospect.

methods
descriptive qualitative case study research with quantitative elements (qual|quan) upon notification of risks involving irradiation treatments for ringworm, based on criterion sampling of files and articles from archives of the israeli media and state archives; stratified sampling of personal files of claimants appealing to the ‘center for compensation of ringworm victims, established in israel; and survey among 871 physicians in israel treating complications of radiation exposure.

results

preliminary findings from archives, personal files and the physicians’ survey indicate notification of the Israeli public in the case of risks involved in irradiation for ringworm was not planned or organized, while in fact motivated by public fear throughout the public media. the media, and especially newspaper articles, had a significant position in notifying the public of risks, more than official health institutions.
among israeli physicians, main sources of knowledge on risks in irradiation treatments for ringworm were medical schools (48%) and the patients (30%), more than regulatory institutions responsible for health policy, such as israeli ministry of health (19%) and health care providers (6%).
most physicians (66%) failed to implement the knowledge within their daily routines in clinics.

discussion & implications

preliminary data emphasizes the need for healthcare regulatory institutions to set a model for informing the public on risks associated with treatments discovered in retrospect, to prevent unnecessary anxiety, a model recommended to be implemented in cooperation with the media.
questions examined in the research will be discusses:
- should the public be notified for complications in medical legitimate treatments once finished?
- who is obliged to notify?
- how should the public be informed: through the media or on a personal level?
- technically possible, can these messages be delivered through email or s.m.s messages or only with consultation?
- are the patients/victims entitled to be compensated?