

# **The perceptions of frailty and how frailty is assessed in patients living with myeloma – a qualitative exploration of patient perspectives.**

## **Introduction**

Multiple myeloma is an incurable cancer of the blood which predominantly affects older adults. With an increase in the ageing population comes an increase in patients with multiple comorbidities, polypharmacy and other potential issues associated with the ageing process. Frailty is defined as a state of increased vulnerability to stressors due to a clinical decline in physiological reserves. It is well recognised that the assessment of frailty is challenging with existing frailty tools used to define frailty in our myeloma patients presenting the challenges of subjectivity, time consuming and possible inaccuracy. It is increasingly recognised that frailty needs to be defined in a more personalised way. What is distinctly lacking in the existing literature is the perception of patients living with myeloma with regards to frailty. This pilot study seeks to fill this gap, by seeking the feedback of those patients who are on the myeloma pathway.

## **Methods**

This was a single centre pilot study undertaken at one of the largest haematology centres in the UK. 9 patients and a carer were recruited into a patient focus group by open invitation from a local myeloma group and outpatient clinic recruitment. The aim of the focus group was to explore patient perceptions of frailty, frailty assessment tools (IMGW and G8) and to give consideration to the use of medical technology in frailty assessment. Tools used to obtain the data were semi-structured group discussions, questionnaires and conducting the G8 screening tool and IMWG frailty assessments on participants. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

## **Results**

Responses around participant perceptions of frailty were categorised following thematic analysis into 4 themes – physical restrictions, psychological wellbeing, social impact and treatment related issues. Physical restrictions had the most responses. None (0%) of the patients considered themselves as frail prior to their diagnosis of myeloma. 44.4% of patients considered themselves as frail currently with their myeloma diagnosis but before frailty was explored in more detail. After the session, 100% of patients thought they would be considered frail based on the IMWG and G8 screening tools. The IMWG classified 6 (66.7%) as intermediate fitness and 2 (22.2%) as frail. The G8 screening tool identified 8 (88.89%) as requiring full geriatric evaluation.

Participant perceptions of the two frailty tools were entirely negative, largely owing to what participants felt was the 'impersonal' nature of the tools. Participants gave feedback on the positive and negative aspects of wearable monitoring devices, with 88.89% willing to wear a monitoring device.

## **Conclusions**

Frailty is a very relevant topic in myeloma, and yet patient perspectives on frailty and how it is assessed have not been explored. This study highlighted that there is a clear disparity between patient perceptions of frailty and how this links to existing frailty assessments. It is clear from the results we need to define frailty in a more personalised way and a more accurate way, giving consideration to how medical technology can potentially play a role in increasing the accuracy of data. This was a small pilot study which will now be expanded upon and explored further with larger patient groups.