|  |
| --- |
| **Beliefs on cancer causation in Samoa: implications for health promotion** |
| **Background/Objectives**Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Samoa with the incidence on the rise. Understanding the key determinants and barriers to prevention, early detection and treatment is fundamental to the development of effective health interventions to tackle this burden. Lay knowledge and beliefs on health and illness have been linked to health outcomes. They can shape lifestyle choices and healthcare-seeking behaviours that can impact health. However, research on lay beliefs on cancer causation in Samoa is limited. This paper reports on findings on cancer causation beliefs from a larger community cancer awareness campaign recall survey. **Methods**A survey was administered in 2018 to a sample of 205 Samoans over the age of 18 at various locations in the Apia town area. The survey achieved good coverage, with people from over 100 villages completing it. The survey aimed to assess recall of a national cancer early detection awareness campaign, and included an open-ended question: *Why do you think Samoans get cancer?***Results**With respect to beliefs on cancer causation the key themes emerged: lifestyle factors (n=190); cancer as a communicable disease (n=37); internal factors (e.g. a curse) (n=20); environmental factors (n=12); lack of prevention and education (n=10); ‘natural causes’ (e.g. genes) (n=8); and other (n=16) (e.g. heavy work). Lack of trust and scepticism towards Western medicine were apparent in some participant responses: *‘cancer is a curse, people should have traditional Samoan massage instead of seeking Western medicine.’***Discussion**The finding that the majority of participants linked cancer causation to lifestyle factors is encouraging for health promotion and suggests that awareness campaigns have been successful in increasing awareness of cancer risk factors. However, cultural beliefs and misconceptions of cancer causation, especially the belief that cancer can be transmitted, were also common. Thus, future health promotion efforts in Samoa should address the cultural factors influencing attitudes towards disease causation, as these can influence health behaviours. Feelings of scepticism towards Western medicine need to be understood and addressed in the context of existing beliefs on cancer. To bring about lifestyle changes conducive to health and improve behaviours for earlier detection and treatment of cancer, culturally sensitive, bottom-up community health promotion efforts are required.**Keywords**Cancer causation, beliefs, Samoa |