

Gastrointestinal symptoms after radiotherapy for gynaecological cancer: an evaluation of a specialist dietetic service in an Irish radiation oncology centre

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1. Introduction

Gastrointestinal (GI) side effects of pelvic radiation therapy can occur during or after treatment, or they can develop months or even years after treatment has been completed. Prevalence of these symptoms varies, with 43% of gynaecological cancer patients at St Luke's Radiation Oncology Network (SLRON) experiencing late GI symptoms after completion of pelvic radiotherapy. In 2023 a new service was established to provide patient access to dietetic support and management of complex GI side effects resulting from cancer treatment.

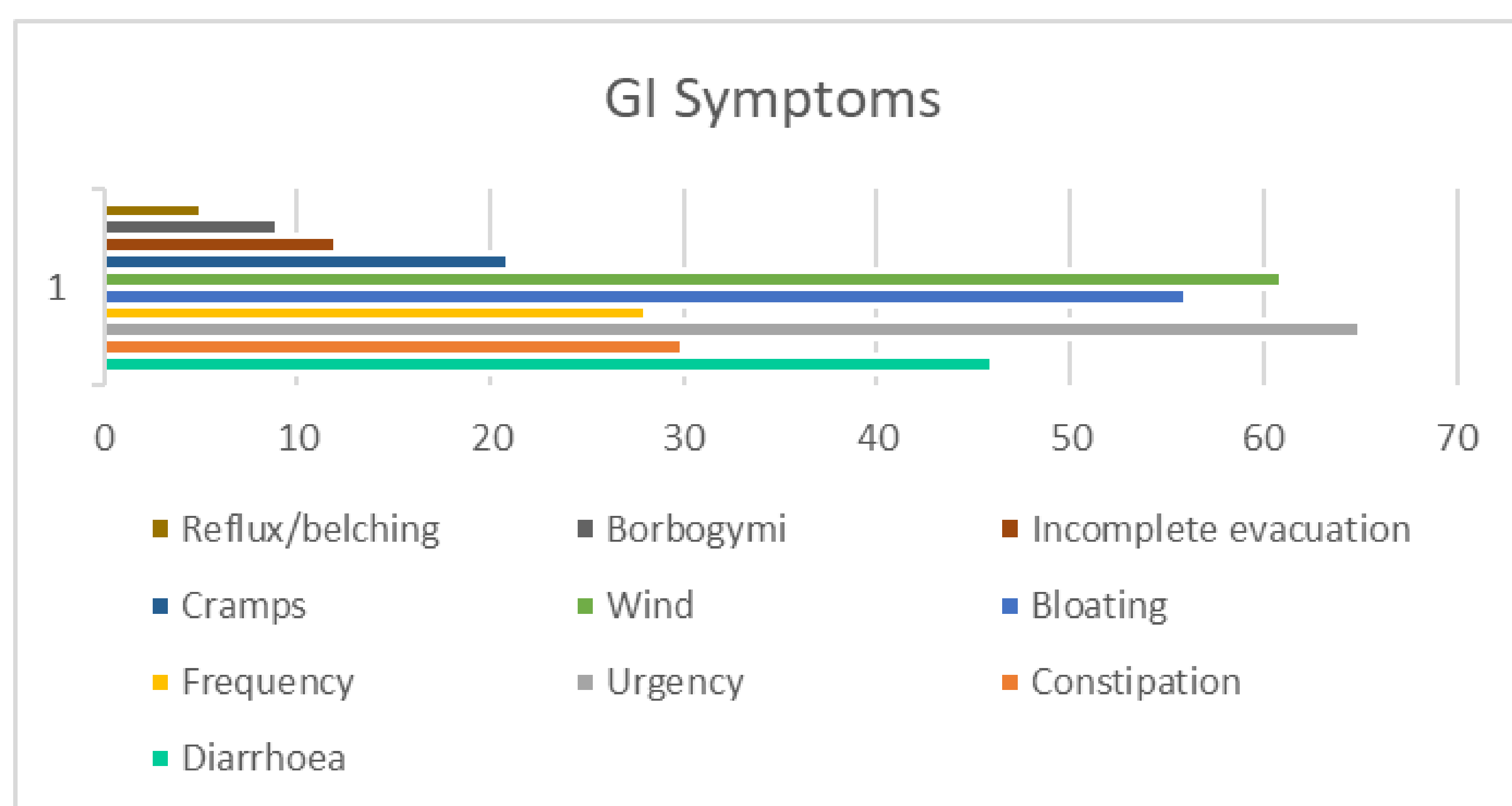
This study aims to evaluate this service and describe the clinical characteristics, GI symptoms, interventions and outcomes of gynaecological cancer patients in an Irish radiation oncology setting.

3. Results

Mean age of the patient cohort was 54 years. 70% had a diagnosis of cervical cancer. All patients underwent radical treatment and 68% received concurrent chemotherapy. 10 individual GI symptoms were reported (Graph1) with a mean of 3.4 symptoms per patient. The median time from radiotherapy to symptom onset was 10 months (range 2-74).

79% underwent at least one GI investigation including bloods tests, colonoscopy and stool sample analysis.

A range of dietary advice was provided as shown in Graph 2. At follow up appointments 86% of patients reported an improvement in GI symptoms.



Graph 1. Incidence of reported GI symptoms

2. Methods

A retrospective observational audit was conducted on electronic records of 57 patients who attended a dietetics post treatment clinic between July 2023 and February 2025. Data collected included oncological diagnosis and treatment received, gastrointestinal symptoms, investigations, management and outcomes. Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel (2013).



Graph 2. Dietary advice provided

4. Conclusion

Gynaecological cancer patients report a complex mix of GI symptoms after radiation therapy. Specialist dietetic support in managing these symptoms improves outcomes.

Further studies which include a QOL measure are needed to aid service planning locally and nationally.

References:

1. Roulston F et al, Gastrointestinal Symptoms after Radiotherapy for Gynaecological Cancer – Experience of an Irish Radiation Oncology Centre *INDI Research Symposium 2022*
2. Gadhok, R. et al. Gastrointestinal consequences of cancer treatment: evaluation of 10 years' experience at a tertiary UK centre. *Frontline gastroenterology*, 2020

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