

Epidemiology of colorectal cancer in Turkey: A cross-sectional disease registry study (A Turkish Oncology Group trial)

COLON

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ABSTRACT

Background/Aims: This study aimed to determine the epidemiological characteristics of colorectal cancer in Turkey.

Materials and Methods: In this multicenter, prospective, and cross-sectional registry study, data for 968 patients with colorectal cancer from 21 centers in 7 geographic regions were analyzed.

Results: Diagnosis was colon cancer in 662 (68.4%) and rectum cancer in 306 (31.6%) patients. In total, 60.9% of patients was male; mean age was 58.9±12.6 years. Among patients, 15.0% was drinking alcohol, 17.5% was smoking, 1.5% had familial history of polyposis, 15.0% had diabetes mellitus, 1.0% had inflammatory bowel disease. Fruit and vegetable consumption was low (<3 times/week) in 35.5% and red meat consumption was high (≥3 times/week) in 47.4% of the patients. Median time-to diagnosis was 3.0 months and 4.0 months for patients with colon and rectum cancer, respectively. Mean body mass index was >25 in all group of patients. Distal rectum (61.3%) and sigmoid colon (36.8%) were the most common locations of cancer, for rectum and colon respectively. In total, 85.6% of patients were operated; 25.8% had emergency surgery. Low anterior resection rate was 64.2% in rectum cancer. In majority (89.8%) of the patients with rectum cancer who received preoperative treatment, conventional chemo-radiotherapy regimen was given. pTNM staging at diagnosis showed that stage III and IV patients were in majority (35.9% and 29.7%, respectively).

Conclusion: Colon cancer is more frequent than rectum cancer in Turkey. Colorectal cancer patients are diagnosed at later stages. Most of the cases were operated. Interregional differences for risk factors are worthwhile for evaluation in future trials.

Keywords: Colorectal cancer, epidemiology, risk factors, Turkey

This study was presented at the ASCO Gastrointestinal Cancers Symposium, January 2011, San Francisco, CA, USA.

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Received: June 13, 2013

Accepted: September 23, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Colorectal cancer is among the most common type of cancers worldwide. According to the GLOBOCAN 2008 database, which is published by the International Agency for Research on Cancer to estimate the worldwide incidence and mortality of 27 cancers from 182 countries, colorectal cancer (1.23 million, 9.7% of the total) is the third most commonly diagnosed cancers worldwide following lung (1.61 million, 12.7%) and breast (1.38 million, 10.9%) cancers (1). Although incidence and mortality of colorectal cancers have been decreasing since 1985, the worldwide incidence is still up to 20.4 for men and 14.7 for women with a mortality rate of 9.7 and 7.0 per 100,000 persons per year. In the less developed regions, the incidence of colorectal cancers for men and women is 12.1 and 9.4 per 100,000 persons per year. However, in the developed regions, this incidence for men and women increases to 37.7 and 24.3 per 100,000 persons per year (1,2). Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of death from any cancer in men in the European Union following the lung cancer (3).

According to Turkish Ministry of Health 2004-2006 Cancer Statistics, the age-standardized incidence rate of colorectal cancer in Turkey is 17.0 in men and 11.7 in women per 100,000 persons (4,5). Estimated number of new colorectal cancer patients in both sexes is 7,218 (4,102 male, 3,116 female) in Turkey, according to GLOBOCAN 2008 data (6).

Incidence of colorectal cancer changes with populations and time (7-10). Populations living in one community whose lifestyles also differ from those of others in the same community also experience different levels of colorectal cancer (3). Ethnic and racial differences in colorectal cancer suggest that genetic and environmental factors including cultural, social, and lifestyle practices play a major part in the etiology of the disease (3). Therefore, population-specific epidemiological data are important to define etiology of colorectal cancer and to develop national policies for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of this highly common type of cancer.

In Turkey, an extensive epidemiological study on the profile of patients with colorectal cancer, and diagnostic and treatment approaches is not available. By this cross-sectional prospective registry study, it was aimed to determine the socio-demographic, clinical, and biological profile of colorectal cancer patients in Turkey, and to evaluate differences between colon cancer (CC) and rectum cancer (RC) in terms of these characteristics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and population

This was a prospective national, multi-center, and cross-sectional disease registry study. There was no investigational treatment and/or any intervention to the treatment methods applicable to this study. As inclusion criteria, between 13th October

2008 and 14th October 2009 (defined 1-year period), patients over 18 years of age with the diagnosis of histologically confirmed colorectal cancer were eligible in the study from medical oncology departments of 21 centers in 7 geographic regions of Turkey. Each patient signed an informed consent form before enrollment to the study. Patients who were not suitable for inclusion criteria (out of defined 1-year period or unsigned informed consent) excluded from the study.

The study was conducted in accordance with Good Epidemiological Practice, Good Clinical Practice, and local requirements. The study was approved by Local Ethics Committee of the coordinating center and Ministry of Health of Turkish Republic.

Study data

Patients were evaluated in one study visit, no follow-up visit was performed. Following data were collected during study visit: socio-demographics, familial cancer history, medical history, time between the initial symptoms and diagnosis, diagnostic tests, tumor markers, localization of tumor, surgery (time, type, blood transfusion), pathology (macroscopy, histological tumor staging, grade, lymph nodes, lymphovascular and neural invasion), and pTNM staging. Pre-operative standard work-up procedures (endoscopy and biopsy, CT and/MRI, laboratory tests) were mandatory for all centers. Diagnostic methods used to evaluate metastasis were also questioned.

Statistical methods

Study data were presented with descriptive statistics (e.g. mean, median, standard deviation, range, number, percentage). Data of CC and RC patients were analyzed separately. Quantitative and qualitative data were compared with the t-test and Chi-square test, respectively. Statistical level of significance was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Patients

Of the 1,057 screened patients, 968 (60.9% male; mean age, 58.9 ± 12.6 years) were eligible complying with inclusion criteria and included in the study (Figure 1). Median number of analyzed patients per center was 31 (2-176). Only 4 centers reg-

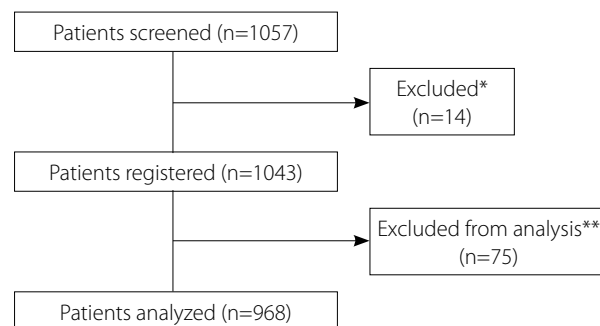


Figure 1. Consort diagram. (*): Patients who declined to participate, (**): Patients who are not meeting inclusion criteria.

istered less than 10 patients. Number of analyzed patients of centers and their represented geographical regions are shown in Table 1. Diagnosis was CC in 662 (68.4%) patients and RC in 306 (31.6%) patients.

Socio-demographics

Male patients were predominant with a rate of 60.7% among CC patients and 61.4% with RC patients (Table 2). Patients with RC were younger than those with CC (p=0.011) (Figure 2). CC was the most common in the Marmara region with 198 patients (29.9%) and RC was most common in the Central Anatolia with 81 cases (26.5%). CC had significantly high percentage than RC in the Mediterranean region (17.7% vs. 12.1%) while RC was higher in the Eastern Anatolia (7.2% vs. 2.7%) and Black Sea regions (10.1% vs. 4.7%) (p<0.001).

Medical history, physical evaluation, and risk factors for colorectal cancer

The ECOG performance status of 629 (66.5%) patients was 0. Almost half (n=463, 49.4%) of the patients had not lost weight while 152 (16.2%) lost 10 or more than 10% of body weight in the last 6 months. In 23% of the patients who had weight loss, the loss was approximately 1-5 kg. Weight loss was similar between CC and RC groups (Table 3).

Hemoglobin level was significantly lower in CC than RC (11.9±2.2 vs. 12.8±1.8 g/dL; p<0.003) (Table 3).

Among 968 patients, 145 (15.0%) were regularly drinking alcohol for 25.7±12.5 years, and 169 (17.5%) were currently smoking. Familial history for cancer was slightly higher in RC (34.7% vs. 37.9%, respectively), and familial history for colorectal cancer (7.4% vs. 5.6%, respectively) was higher in CC patients (Table 3).

Among 968 patients 145 (15.0%) had diabetes mellitus, 96 (9.9%) had dyslipidemia, 283 (29.2%) had hypertension, and 93 (9.6%) had coronary arterial disease. Ten patients (1.0%) had inflammatory bowel disease (Table 3).

Table 1. Number of analyzed patients of centers and their represented geographical regions

Geographical regions	Cities	Number of representing centers	Number of analyzed patients
Marmara	Istanbul, Bursa, Kocaeli	5	278
Black Sea		(2)*	62
Aegean	Aydın, Denizli	2	97
Central Anatolia	Ankara, Konya, Kayseri	6	265
Eastern Anatolia	Erzurum, Elazığ, Malatya	3	40
Mediterranean	Antalya, Icel, Adana	3	154
Southeastern Anatolia	Gaziantep, Diyarbakir	2	72

*. Patients from Black Sea region are registered in the centers of Istanbul and Ankara.

Fruit and vegetable consumption was high (≥3 times/week) for 64.5% of patients and red meat consumption was low (<3 times/week) for 52.6% of the patients (Table 4). Red meat consumption was significantly higher in Marmara, Central Anatolia, and Eastern Anatolia regions than in Aegean and Mediterranean regions (Table 5).

Table 2. Socio-demographical characteristics of study patients

		Colon cancer n=662	Rectum cancer n=306
Gender ^a	Female	260 (39.3%)	118 (38.6%)
	Male	402 (60.7%)	188 (61.4%)
Mean age (years) ^b		59.63±12.47	57.43±12.75
Age distribution (years)	18-30	16 (2.4%)	6 (1.9%)
	31-40	37 (5.6%)	28 (9.1%)
	41-50	92 (13.9%)	53 (17.3%)
	51-60	188 (28.4%)	92 (30.1%)
	61-70	197 (29.8%)	82 (26.8%)
	71-80	113 (17.1%)	36 (11.8%)
	>81	19 (2.9%)	9 (2.9%)
Geographical regions ^c	Marmara	198 (29.9%)	80 (26.1%)
	Black Sea	31 (4.7%)	31 (10.1%)
	Aegean	65 (9.8%)	32 (10.5%)
	Central Anatolia	184 (27.8%)	81 (26.5%)
	Eastern Anatolia	18 (2.7%)	22 (7.2%)
	Mediterranean	117 (17.7%)	37 (12.1%)
	Southeastern Anatolia	49 (7.4%)	23 (7.5%)
Living area ^a	Town	92 (13.9%)	49 (16%)
	Village	47 (7.1%)	27 (8.8%)
	City	497 (75.1%)	225 (73.5%)
	Unknown	26 (3.9%)	5 (1.6%)

^aNot significant

^bp=0.011

^cp<0.001

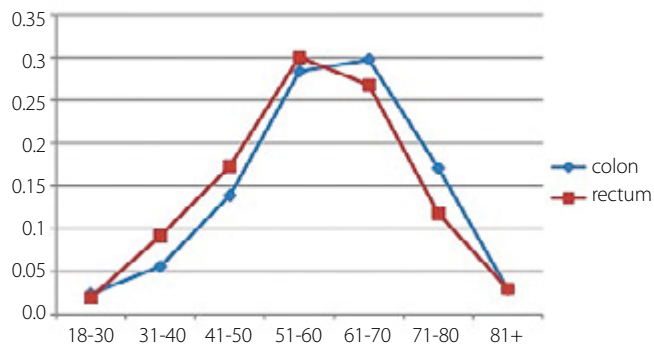


Figure 2. Age distribution of patients with colon and rectum cancer.

Table 3. Medical history, physical findings, and risk factors for colorectal cancer

		Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)	p value
ECOG performance status	0	424 (65.9%)	205 (67.7%)	NS
	1	167 (26.0%)	82 (27.1%)	
	2	40 (6.2%)	14 (4.6%)	
	3	10 (1.6%)	2 (0.7%)	
	4	2 (0.3%)	-	
Body mass index (mean±SD, kg/m ²)		25.8±4.2	25.7±4.4	NS
Weight loss during last six months (kg)		3.9±5.2	3.4±4.6	NS
Hemoglobin (mean±SD, g/dL)	Male	11.9±2.2	12.8±1.8	0.001
	Female	10.9±1.9	11.5±1.5	0.003
Cigarette smoking	Non-smoker	369 (55.7%)	159 (52.0%)	0.098
	Former smoker	187 (28.3%)	84 (27.4%)	
	Currently smoking	106 (16.0%)	63 (20.6%)	
Alcohol consumption	Drinking	99 (14.9%)	46 (15.0%)	NS
	Not drinking	563 (85.1%)	260 (85.0%)	
Family history for colorectal cancer ^a		49 (7.4%)	17 (5.6%)	NS
Family history for cancer		230 (34.7%)	116 (37.9%)	NS
Familial polyposis		7 (1.1%)	8 (2.6%)	NS
Lynch syndrome		1 (0.2%)	3 (0.9%)	NS
Inflammatory bowel disease	Ulcerative colitis	5 (0.8%)	2 (0.6%)	NS
	Crohn disease	3 (0.4%)	0	NS
Concomitant diseases	Hypertension	205 (31.0%)	78 (25.5%)	NS
	Diabetes mellitus	104 (15.7%)	41 (13.4%)	NS
	Coronary arterial disease	68 (10.3%)	25 (8.2%)	NS
	Dyslipidemia	68 (10.3%)	28 (9.1%)	NS
	Others	149 (22.5%)	55 (18.0%)	-

^aIn the first-degree relatives, ≤50 years of age.
SD: Standard deviation; NS: not significant

Table 4. Red meat and fruit/vegetable consumption in terms of cancer type

	Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)
Red meat consumption		
High (≥3 times/week)	242 (36.6%)	121 (39.5%)
Low (<3 times/week)	350 (52.9%)	159 (52.0%)
None	70 (10.6%)	26 (8.5%)
Fruits and vegetables in diet		
High (≥3 times/week)	411 (62.1%)	213 (69.6%)
Low (<3 times/week)	184 (27.8%)	72 (23.5%)
None	67 (10.1%)	21 (6.9%)

Table 5. Red meat consumption by geographical regions

	Low (<3 times/week) (n=509)	High (≥3 times/week) (n=363)	p value
Marmara	127 (25%)	125 (34.4%)	0.002
Black Sea	25 (4.9%)	28 (7.7%)	NS
Aegean	64 (12.6%)	23 (6.3%)	0.002
Central Anatolia	122 (24%)	112 (30.9%)	0.02
Eastern Anatolia	14 (2.8%)	24 (6.6%)	0.007
Mediterranean	116 (22.8%)	23 (6.3%)	<0.001
Southeastern Anatolia	41 (8.1%)	28 (7.7%)	NS

NS: not significant

Diagnosis of colorectal cancer

The median duration between first symptoms and diagnosis was 3.0 months (range 1.0-48.0 months) and 4.0 months (range 1.0-48.0 months) for CC and RC patients, respectively (Table 6).

In endoscopic examination, primary tumor location for colon was sigmoid colon (36.8%), cecum (10.1%), ascending colon (9.7%), descending colon (8.1%), and transverse colon (7.1%). Primary location for RC was distal rectum (61.3%), medial rectum (13.5%), and proximal rectum (7.4%).

Preoperative evaluation of tumor markers such as CEA and CA 19-9 was performed in 476 (49.0%) and 433 (44.7%) patients, respectively. Considering CEA levels <5 ng/mL as normal for smoking and <2.5 ng/mL for non-smoking patients, preoperative CEA was pathological in 214 (69.3%) CC patients and in 98 (61.6%) RC patients. Considering CA 19-9 levels between 0 and 37 IU/mL as normal, preoperative CA 19-9 was abnormal in 88 (31.6%) CC patients and in 32 (20.6%) RC patients.

Preoperative endoscopic ultrasonography (EUS) and pelvic magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was performed in 46 (15.0%) and 76 (24.8%) of RC patients, respectively.

Major diagnostic method used to evaluate metastasis was computerized tomography (CT) scan with 94.8%. PET is used 2.2% for this aim.

Treatment of colorectal cancer

Surgery

In total, 829 of 968 (85.6%) patients were operated (Table 7). Of these patients, 214 (25.8%) had emergency surgery while 615 (74.2%) had elective surgery. The ratio of the patients who have gone to emergent surgery was higher in CC patients than RC patients (29.7% vs. 16.7%, $p < 0.001$). Among the 829 patients who were operated, 587 (70.8%) had radical surgery, 156 (18.8%) had explorative surgery (diagnostic laparotomy), and 86 (10.4%) had palliative surgery. The ratio of the patients who had radical surgery was higher in RC group (76.4% vs. 68.4%, $p = 0.026$).

The most common surgical method was open surgery (93.3%) in CC patients and low anterior resection (64.2%) in RC patients.

Table 6. Symptom to diagnosis duration

	Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)
0-3 months	299 (56.2%)	124 (49.4%)
4-6 months	119 (22.4%)	65 (25.9%)
7-12 months	80 (15.0%)	44 (17.5%)
13-24 months	31 (5.8%)	14 (5.6%)
≥25 months	3 (0.6%)	4 (1.6%)
Total	532 (100.0%)	251 (100.0%)

Metastasectomy was performed in 40 (16.3%) of the metastatic patients.

Chemotherapy/radiotherapy

Preoperatively, 77 (25.8%) RC patients received chemo-radiotherapy, 13 (4.2%) had chemotherapy, and 9 (2.9%) had radiotherapy. Rest of RC patients (n=205, 66.9%) have not received any preoperative treatment. Radiotherapy and bolus 5-fluorouracil were applied to 30 (37.9%), and radiotherapy and 5-fluorouracil continuous infusion were applied to 46 (58.2%) patients. Only 3 patients (3.7%) received radiotherapy and oral fluoropyrimidine preoperatively. In majority (n=79, 89.8%) of the patients who received preoperative radiotherapy, conventional regimen for 25 days was administered, while 5x5 Swedish regimen was given in only 9 (10.2%) patients.

Pathological findings

In both CC and RC patients, ulcero-vegetative form was the most frequently (29.2%) seen macroscopic type of the tumor (Table 8). Microscopic evaluation showed that among all colorectal cancer patients, 18.3% were well differentiated (G1), 44.8% were moderately differentiated (G2), 13.3% were poorly differentiated (G3). Lympho-vascular and neural invasion were positive in 320 (33.1%) and 213 (22.0%) of all colorectal cancer patients, respectively. In both CC and RC group of patients, subserosa involvement (pT3) was the most frequently (55.4%)

Table 7. Details of surgical treatment of colorectal cancer

	Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)	p value
Operated	583 (88.1%)	246 (80.4%)	0.002
Emergency operation	173 (29.7%)	41 (16.7%)	<0.001
Type of surgery			
Explorative	119 (20.4%)	37 (15.0%)	
Palliative	65 (11.1%)	21 (8.5%)	
Radical	399 (68.4%)	188 (76.4%)	0.026
Surgical methods			
Open	544 (93.3%)	-	
Laparoscopic	34 (5.8%)	-	
Mixed (Hand assistant)	4 (0.7%)	-	
Endoscopic resection	1 (0.2%)	-	
Low anterior resection	-	158 (64.2%)	
Abdomino-perineal resection	-	55 (22.4%)	
Local excision	-	11 (4.5%)	
Hartmann	-	2 (0.7%)	
Other	-	20 (8.2%)	
Stent	5 (0.8%)	13 (4.2%)	<0.001
Blood transfusion	131 (22.5%)	57 (23.2%)	NS
NS: not significant			

Table 8. Pathological findings of colorectal cancer

	Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)		Colon cancer (n=662)	Rectum cancer (n=306)
Macroscopic types			Primary tumor staging		
Fungitive	49 (7.4%)	58 (18.9%)	TX	108 (16.3%)	63 (20.6%)
Infiltrative	86 (12.9%)	41 (13.4%)	T0	2 (0.3%)	4 (1.3%)
Papillary	2 (0.3%)	4 (1.3%)	Tis	2 (0.3%)	-
Polypoid	93 (14.1%)	30 (9.8%)	T1	9 (1.3%)	5 (1.6%)
Ulcerative	124 (18.7%)	70 (22.9%)	T2	52 (7.9%)	47 (15.3%)
Ulcerovegetative	192 (29%)	91 (29.7%)	T3	384 (58.0%)	152 (49.7%)
Unknown	116 (17.5%)	12 (3.9%)	T4	105 (15.9%)	35 (11.4%)
Differentiation			Regional lymph nodes		
G1	126 (19.0%)	51 (16.7%)	NX	159 (24.0%)	87 (28.4%)
G2	281 (42.4%)	153 (50%)	N0	204 (30.8%)	93 (30.4%)
G3	89 (13.4%)	40 (13.0%)	N1	168 (25.4%)	67 (21.9%)
G4	4 (0.6%)	-	N2	131 (19.8%)	59 (19.3%)
GX	162 (24.5%)	62 (20.3%)	Distant metastasis		
Lymphovascular invasion	229 (34.6%)	91 (29.7%)	M0	416 (62.8%)	201 (65.7%)
Neural invasion	147 (22.2%)	66 (21.6%)	M1	184 (27.8%)	61 (19.9%)
Number of lymph nodes (mean±SD)			Mx	62 (9.4%)	44 (14.4%)
Resected	16.7±15.6	12.3±10.6	Metastatic sites		
Metastatic	2.4±5.2	2.3±4.4	Liver	141 (56.6%)	50 (61.0%)
Immunoreactive	10.2±13.8	7.0±9.2	Abdominal wall (peritoneum+omentum)	41 (16.5%)	4 (4.9%)
Maximum size of metastatic lymph node (mm)	1.7±5.9	2.3±7.9	Lung (pleura)	24 (9.6%)	14 (17.1%)
			Lymph nodes (intra-abdominal)	17 (6.8%)	6 (7.3%)
			Others	26 (12.2%)	8 (9.8%)

seen degree of invasion for the primary tumor. Median number of dissected lymph nodes was 13 (range 0-99) and mean value of maximum size of involved node was 1.91 mm. The percentage of node negative (pN0) and node positive (pN1 and pN2) patients was 30.7% and 43.9%, respectively in all patients.

Disease staging

For 142 (14.7%) patients who cannot be assessed optimally (due to pTx, pNx and/or Mx) disease could not be staged. Figure 3 shows AJCC (TNM) pathological staging of total 826 patients (580 CC, 246 RC). Among 826 patients, 297 stage III cancer patients were in majority (35.9%). In CC group, the incidence of distant metastasis (M1) was higher than RC group (31.7% vs 24.7%, $p=0.046$). Liver was the most common metastatic site (57.7%).

DISCUSSION

Cancer registry studies provide the main data to develop strategies for improving our understanding of cancer and for development of national policies and guidelines for prevention, di-

agnosis, and treatment of cancer. In this cross-sectional registry study, we determined the profile of colorectal cancer patients in Turkey.

The GLOBOCAN 2008 database reveals that 12.7 million new cancer cases and 7.6 million cancer deaths occurred in 2008, with 56% of new cancer cases and 63% of the cancer deaths occurring in the less developed regions of the world (1). Colorectal cancer is among the most common cancers worldwide with high mortality rate. It is estimated that colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cause of death from cancer worldwide (10). Colorectal cancer is the fourth most common cancer (6.9% of total) in men and second in women (8.1%) in Turkey (4,5).

In spite of high incidence rate of colorectal cancer in Turkey, there are a few studies in the literature on the epidemiology of colorectal cancers in Turkey, which presented data of colorectal cancer patients from single-center (11,12). The present report is the first prospective long-term registry study determining the general profile of colorectal cancer patients in Turkey.

Twenty-five centers representing the country geographically were invited to enroll new colorectal cancer patients during one-year period and 968 patients from medical oncology departments of 21 centers were included in the study. Demographic characteristics of patients were in line with the previous epidemiological data of colorectal cancers. Mean age of patients was 58.9±12.6 years, and 60.9% were male. It is known that more than 90% of colorectal cancer cases occur in people aged 50 or older (10,13). Yilmazlar et al. (11) and Zorluoglu et al. (12) who were both from same center (Uludag University, Bursa in Marmara region) also reported in their retrospective data that young patients (<40-45 years old) accounted for only 20% of all colorectal cancer patients in Turkey. This ratio was 8.9% in our serial and age distribution showed that patients with RC were younger than those with CC.

In our study population, CC was more frequent (68.4%) than RC (31.6%). Indeed, in a 21-year registry of colorectal cancer, Ponz de Leon et al. (14) reported a tendency over time towards a progressive increase of colonic tumors and decrease in rectal neoplasms. Among geographical regions of Turkey, CC was the most common in the Marmara region with 198 patients (29.9%) and RC was most common in the Central Anatolia with 81 cases (26.5%) in all country. CC had significantly high proportion than RC in the Mediterranean region (17.7% versus 12.1%), while RC was higher in the Eastern Anatolia (7.2% versus 2.7%) and Black Sea regions (10.1% versus 4.7%) (p<0.001) (Table 2). But, when we look at the percentage of CC and RC separately in each region outside total population, in spite of low number of patients, the ratio of colon and rectum cancer were equal in the Black Sea region, CC was higher in the other 5 regions except Eastern Anatolia where the highest percentage of RC was observed (55% vs 45%) (Figure 4). These inter-regional differences of relative percentage between CC and RC cases may be due to lifestyle factors. For example, red meat consumption was significantly high in Marmara, Central and Eastern Anatolia regions. On the other hand, the percentage of smoking patients was slightly higher but not significant in RC group. The role of red meat consumption and smoking should be elucidated in future trials to understand inter-regional differences of risk factors. Our results about inter-regional differences are very preliminary and future trials should also take into account regional population-based registries.

In the previous studies; age, obesity, diabetes mellitus, family history, hereditary conditions, inflammatory bowel disease, diet (consumption of red and processed meat, diet low in fruits and vegetable), and lifestyle factors (physical activity, alcohol in-take, and smoking) were positively correlated with the risk of colorectal cancers (7,13,15-17). It was also reported that long-term ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease increases the risk of developing colorectal cancer (18,19). In terms of these risk factors, 15.0% of our study population was regularly drinking alcohol, 17.5% was currently smoking, 1.5% had positive familial history of polyposis, 15.0% had diabetes mellitus, and 1.0%

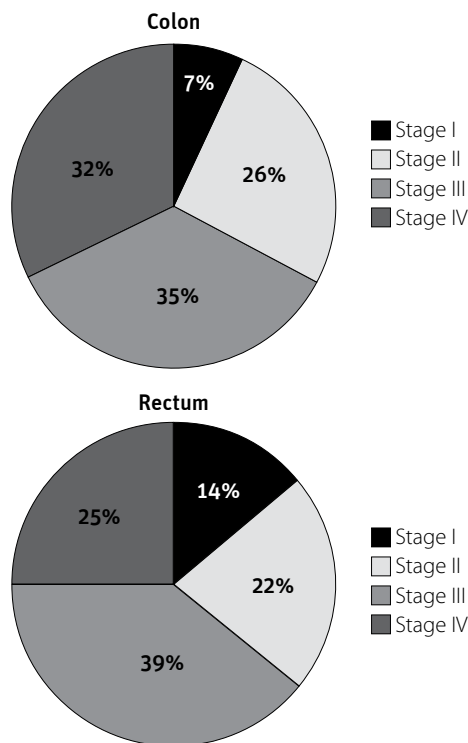


Figure 3. AJCC/TNM Staging for colon and rectum cancer patients.

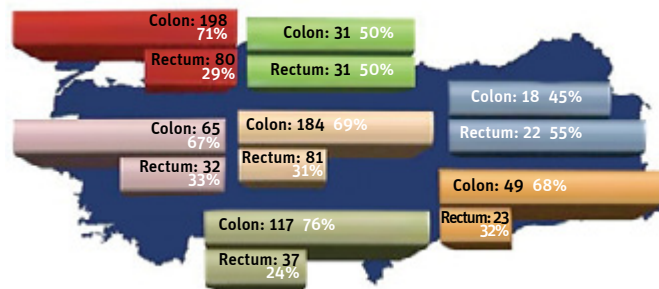


Figure 4. Distribution of colon and rectum cancer patients by regions.

had inflammatory bowel disease. Mean body mass index was superior of upper limit in our patient population although approximately 4 kg weight loss during last 6 months. Fruit and vegetable consumption was low (<3 times/week) in 35.5% of patients and red meat consumption was high (≥3 times/week) in 47.4% of the patients. Patients with CC and RC had no clinically significant difference in terms of risk factors. Among the RC patients, more patients were currently smoking (20.6%) but this was not statistically significant (p=0.098). Family history did not show any accumulation of inherited colorectal cancer cases in our patients.

As a physical finding, anemia was significantly more frequent in patients with CC in both sex as well (p<0.005). It is known that anemia is a most common sign of right-sided colorectal cancers (20,21).

We found that the median duration between first symptoms and diagnosis was 3.0 months and 4.0 months for patients with CC and RC, respectively. A few patients announced beginning of first symptoms more than 2 years; the main reason of this can be inattention of severity of the disease or reason may be related non-cancer causes. Yilmazlar et al. (11) retrospectively reviewed 46 patients under 40 years old and reported that the mean duration of time from the onset of symptoms to diagnosis was 5.8 months. The shorter time to diagnosis in our study may be due to difference in study designs, sample sizes and increased awareness for early diagnosis over time. Our findings showed that distal rectum was the most common location for RC and sigmoid colon was the most common location for CC. This finding was similar to studies published with an interval of nearly 10 years by Yilmazlar et al. (11) and Zorluoglu et al. (12) who reported that colorectal tumor was localized at the sigmoid and the rectum in 74-80% of cases.

Preoperative evaluation of tumor markers such as CEA and CA 19-9 was performed in around 45% of patients, while EUS and MRI were performed in 15.0% and 24.8% of the patients with RC, respectively. This is not sufficient in terms of preoperative work-up for clinical staging and needs improvements.

Quality of surgery and pathology is extremely important in the management of colorectal cancer. Median number of dissected lymph nodes was 13 in all group of patients; this is an acceptable value for accuracy of pathological staging; it should be minimum 12 (22). The ultimate goals of surgery in the modern management of RC are the improving local control and overall survival, maintaining quality of life and preserving sphincter, genitourinary, and sexual functions (23). For this purpose, total mesorectal excision (TME) with autonomic nerve preservation via low anterior resection (LAR) is the treatment of choice for appropriate patients with RC (23-25). TME was applied in 41.3% of RC patients in our serial and LAR ratio was 64.2%. There was no information in pathology reports about TME surgery in 39% of our patients.

In patients with transmural and/or node positive disease (T3/T4 and/or N+) with no distant metastases, preoperative chemoradiation is widely accepted (23). Preoperatively, 25.8% of patients with RC received chemoradiotherapy in this trial. There was not cTNM information for this subgroup of patients, and pTNM staging demonstrated 39% stage III disease; this reflects that postoperative chemo-radiotherapy is still an option in some centers.

Patients were diagnosed at a considerably later stage (as 35.9% patients were at stage III, 29.7% patients were at stage IV) and most of the cases (85.6%) were operated. Mainly, 70.8% of patients had radical surgery. Thus, majority of patients were referring to medical oncology clinics after receiving surgical treatment. In the study by Cook et al. (26) surgical resection was applied in 66% of stage 4 colorectal cancer patients. In

our study, 25.8% of operated patients had emergency surgery while 74.2% had elective surgery. In the study by Zorluoglu et al. (12), 6.6% of 136 patients were operated emergently, the rest (93.3%) were operated electively.

Among patients who have colorectal cancer, approximately 50% will eventually develop liver metastases (16). The proportion of colorectal cancer patients with synchronous liver metastases was reported as 14.5% (27). We found that 33.2% of patients had metastasis and liver was the most common metastatic site (57.7%). Metastasectomy was performed in 40 (16.3%) of the metastatic patients.

This study has some limitations. First and main limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional design. Considering that this is the first large registry study reporting colorectal cancer profile in Turkey, further prospective surveys including patients across the country would provide definite data on the epidemiology of colorectal cancer in Turkey. Secondly, the present data are from medical oncology departments as registration centers in this study. More mature data can be obtained by adding departments of surgery in future trials.

As a conclusion, CC is more frequent than RC in Turkey. Patients with colorectal cancer are diagnosed at considerably later stages and most of the cases are operated. Although, operative, pre-operative, and post-operative standard procedures as well as pathological evaluations are satisfactory, but they need improvements. The role of the consumption of red meat, obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes mellitus, and smoking as risk factors for colorectal cancers as well as inter-regional differences should be evaluated in further prospective trials with larger sample size.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the ethics committee of Local Ethics Committee of the coordinating center (Istanbul University, Institute of Oncology) and Ministry of Health of Turkish Republic.

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from patients who participated in this study.

Peer-review: Externally peer reviewed.

Author contributions: Concept - N.F.A., G.D., R.D.; Design - N.F.A., G.D., R.D.; Supervision - N.F.A., R.D.; Resource - S.Y., N.F.A., N.S.T., M.O., G.D., M.O., A.Y. C.C., H.A., M.A., N.M., K.U., A.I., D.U., O.O., A.A., E.S., S.B.T., O.M., A.O., T.E.; Materials - S.Y., N.F.A., N.S.T., M.O., G.D., M.O., A.Y. C.C., H.A., M.A., N.M., K.U., A.I., D.U., O.O., A.A., E.S., S.B.T., O.M., A.O., T.E.; Data Collection&/or Processing - R.D., N.F.A.; Analysis&/or Interpretation - R.D., N.F.A., G.D.; Literature Search - N.F.A., G.D.; Writing - N.F.A., R.D.; Critical Reviews - S.Y., G.D.

Acknowledgements: Authors would like to thank to the staff of Monitor Medical Research and Consulting (Istanbul, Turkey) for study operation and Sanofi-Aventis Turkey for funding the statistical analysis.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Financial Disclosure: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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