

Assessment of the Awareness in Management of Chemotherapy Related Adverse Effects Experienced by Cancer Patients at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Cancer accounts for majority of the disease related deaths all over the world. Although cancer can be treated with chemotherapy successfully, the burden of chemotherapy related side effects makes a negative impact about the treatment in patients. The study was carried out in the purpose of assessment of awareness in management of chemotherapy related adverse effects experienced by the cancer patients at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka. Moreover, it focused on the patients' knowledge on the disease and the treatment schedule and the most frequently experienced side effects by the patients. This is a single centre descriptive cross-sectional study. The study population of 155 cancer patients with multiple carcinomas, attending medical oncology clinics at Apeksha Hospital was selected randomly. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to gather information. Collected data was analysed by SPSS Version 23 software. The diagnosis of the disease was known by almost all the participants. The names of the chemotherapy medicines receiving were fully known by only one fifth of the total population. Most commonly experienced adverse effect among the population was fatigue. Drinking adequate amount of fluid had been the most frequently followed instruction in order to minimize the adverse effects. Discussions with healthcare professionals were chosen as the

most effective way of having information. Discomfort due to chemotherapy related adverse effects may cause delay or early termination of treatments and increase unnecessary hospital admissions. A thorough counselling in managing the adverse effects accounts a better quality of life to the patient.

Keywords: Cancer, Chemotherapy, Side effects

Introduction

The occurrence of cancer has been notable in recent times. Though chemotherapy treats cancer specifically, patients experience adverse effects during active treatment, immediate after treatment or later. Due to inappropriate management of adverse effects their treatments may be delayed or terminated earlier. Patients undergoing chemotherapy treatments often receive information about common adverse effects related to chemotherapy from their health care professionals in Sri Lanka. Though they receive relevant and adequate information, the patients are still conversant in management of chemotherapy related adverse effects. The study was carried out in the purpose of assessment of awareness in management of chemotherapy related adverse effects experienced by the cancer patients at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka. Moreover, it focused on the most common cancer type, the patients' knowledge

on the disease and the treatment schedule, the most common side effects experienced by the patients and informational need of the patients in minimizing adverse effects.

Methodology

This is a single centre descriptive cross-sectional study. The study population was 155 cancer patients with multiple carcinomas, attending medical oncology clinics at Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama, Sri Lanka. Every 5th patient who fulfilled inclusion criteria was included to the study and all the patients were notified that inclusion for this survey is entirely voluntary. The privacy and confidentiality of all participants were protected throughout the study. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to gather information. Collected data was analysed by SPSS Version 23 software. Data processing was done by categorizing data, coding, summarizing and verification by computer. Production and interpretation of frequencies, tables and graphs were used to describe the findings.

Results and Discussion

Of 155 participants majority were females. Nearly half of the participants belonged to the age group of 53-70 years. Among the total population, most of them had studied up to A/L and were non-occupied. Results of the study revealed, the most common cancer types of females were breast, womb colo-rectal, ovarian, and cervical cancers, while blood, neck, colo-rectal and lung cancers were common in males. The diagnosis of the disease was known by almost all the participants and the stage of cancer and treatment schedule was known by majority (90.1%) of the participants. It seemed that most of the patients dedicated to have their treatment cycles regularly. Names of the chemotherapy medicines receiving were fully known by only one fifth of the total population. This may be due to patient's unfamiliarity with the names of chemotherapy agents, the difficulty in

pronouncing and remembering them. Most commonly experienced side effect among the population was fatigue (71%). Alopecia, nausea and vomiting were also reported by more than half of the total population. Reduction in White Blood Cells, constipation, stomatitis, fever, skin problems, dysuria were among the significantly occurring side effects experienced by the patients. Gum bleeding, back pain, breathing difficulties, weakness in teeth, burning sensation, delay menstruation, discoloration of skin, discoloration of nails, dry skin, headache, leg pain, sleeplessness had been reported by less than 10% of participants in each. Of respondents, majority (85.2%) knew that drinking adequate amount of fluid can remove harmful agents from the body. About 70% respondents knew that having more fresh vegetables and fruits gain more benefits while having chemotherapy. More than half of respondents had known to have frequent small meals to avoid emesis as well as to increase appetite. To prevent acquiring of infections, more than 60% of respondents were aware to avoid public places after having chemotherapy treatments. Nearly half of respondents knew that wearing a mask was essential to prevent inhalation of harmful agents in order to prevent from infections. About 20% of participants knew that dry skin conditions can be managed by applying moisturizing creams. Among participants 17.4% of respondents were knowledgeable to avoid constipation conditions by eating high fiber foods with adequate fluid, however 20.6% participants were used to treat constipation when it became unmanageable. Patients had a satisfactory knowledge and adherence regarding management of more frequently experienced side effects such as nausea, vomiting, anorexia, constipation, skin problems and in taking precautionary actions to avoid secondary side effects such as infections which occur as a result of immunity suppression in chemotherapy. Adverse effects management methods were followed only for

a limited number of side effects by the patients including methods to relieve nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and protection from infections. Although the most common side effect was fatigue, none of the respondents had followed any management method to minimize it. It was observed that, there is a gap between patients' actual need and information provided by the health care professionals.

Conclusion

Due to inappropriate management of adverse effects, patients' treatments may be delayed or terminated earlier which may increase morbidity and mortality, increase unnecessary hospital admissions and decrease cure rate. As discomforts due to chemotherapy related side effects negatively influence the cancer patients, they demanded more information on side effects and management methods to cope with the side effects successfully. As participants perceived more information, it is suggested to arrange more interactive counselling sessions for patients by healthcare professionals. A

thorough counselling in management methods of the side effects may account a better quality of life to the cancer patient.

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