

RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Symptom Management in Patients with Cancer of the Female Reproductive System Receiving Chemotherapy

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the feelings, symptom management, and needs of patients with gynecological cancer receiving chemotherapy at Chiang Mai University Hospital, Chiang Mai, Thailand. During the period July 2006 and June 2007, 286 patients were recruited. The most common chemotherapeutic regimen was paclitaxel and carboplatin followed by single carboplatin and weekly cisplatin. Five severe and frequent complications were as follows: alopecia, anorexia, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting. Some 41.9% could well tolerate with such complications but 50.3% had various feelings including irritability, boredom, dejection, fear, stress, and anxiety. Anorexia was the symptom that the majority of them could best manage, 17.4% by eating as much as they can and 32.6% by selecting different foods from normal, such as fruit, sweetmeats, noodles, milk. For nausea and vomiting, 31.3% managed by eating fruit, drinking sour juice, and holding sour fruit in mouth, and 16.0% used the breathing method, eating something cold, such as ice-cream, or hot food like noodles. For health needs, 41.0% needed encouragement, care, health education, and information from doctors and nurses, and 5.0% needed care and encouragement from their family, and sympathy from neighbors and colleagues. In conclusion, gynecological cancer patients receiving chemotherapy experience a variety of feelings, symptom management, and health needs. Nurses need to explain the pathology of the occurring symptoms so that the patients can understand and accept the symptoms to lessen their negative impact.

Key Words: Symptom management - gynecological cancer - chemotherapy

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Introduction

The most common female cancers arise in the cervix and the breast. According to records taken by the Division of Gynecologic Oncology, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University during 2001-2008; incidences of gynecologic cancer were found in 706-870 female patients. The most commonly types of cancer found were cervical cancer, ovarian carcinoma, and uterine cancer, respectively. There were various treatments of cancer; i.e. LEEP, radical hysterectomy, surgical staging procedure, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy (Tangkaratt, 2004).

Chemotherapy resulted in patient's complications; i.e. neutropenia, anemia, and thrombocytopenia. The therapy also caused nausea, vomiting, fatigue, alopecia, stomatitis, constipation, and diarrhea (Kearney and Richardson, 2006; Kietpeerakool et al., 2005). It was evident that the results of cancerous condition as well as the complications both from the illness itself and the chemotherapy were serious impacts on physical, mental, emotional, and social changes.

As a result of the diseases and their impacts, the patients sought to manage such symptoms and complications resulting from the diseases and treatments

with a variety of methods according to their personal perceptions. The objective of symptom management was to prevent, mitigate, or delay the negative consequences by using medical methods, healthcare personnel, and self-care. Aspects to be considered were which method to be used, when to use it, where to use it, reason for using it, degree of application, to whom the method is suitable, and how to apply it. Advantages obtained from the efficient symptom management were improvement of symptoms, anguish abatement, no recurrence of symptoms, ability to conduct activities, and better quality of life (Dodd et al., 2001).

As a service provider, a nurse was a healthcare personnel whose duties were to take care of patients by assessing their problems and needs, or to help solve the patients' problems, or to satisfy their needs. If nurses had adequate knowledge, abilities, and experiences, were able to recognize stress-inducing situations, acquired the ability to manage the patients' symptoms efficiently, could pass on their knowledge to other nursing personnel or patients, and were well-aware of the patients' needs; they could perform efficient nursing activities, serve the patients' need, eliminate the problems, or manage such situations appropriately. Therefore, this research aimed to study various chemotherapeutic symptoms in

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