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Role of different health care professionals in counseling patients on oral anticancer drugs

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Abstract: Background & Objectives

The use of oral anticancer drugs (OAD) has increased significantly over the last years. One of the most important challenges in this respect is patient counseling.

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of different health care professionals (HCP; oncologist, nurse and pharmacist) in the counseling of patients on OAD.

Settings & Method

Qualitative interviews with different HCP in eight Flemish hospitals participating in the IPSOC (1) study. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a thematic framework approach.

Main outcome measures

1) Current practice in counseling patients on OAD; 2) ideas of HCP on how to organize pharmaceutical care for patients on OAD

Results

In general, HCP experience the shift from IV towards oral anticancer treatment as positive, with as main advantages the fact that patients can stay at home, and the drug formulation.

Currently, patient counseling is mostly performed by the oncologist and the nurse, while the role of the pharmacist is limited. Most interviewees claimed that oral as well as written information is provided to patients.

Adherence was considered to be high. The different systems that can be used to enhance adherence are known by HCP, but not always used.

Considering side effects, HCP seem to expect that patients can detect symptoms, treat the most obvious ones, and contact a physician (either the oncologist or the GP) when serious complications occur.

Counseling is not in all hospitals organized in a multi-disciplinary way. The roles of the different HCP are not well defined, but plans are made on future care pathways.

Conclusion

The role of different HCP in counseling patients on OAD is very diverse, but shows room for improvement. Different hospitals have concrete plans to optimize care pathways.

Currently, the oncologist is experienced as the most important HCP in patient counseling, although input from the nurses is expected. In most of the hospitals, the pharmacist plays no role.

(1) IPSOC study: Investigating Patient Satisfaction with Oral anti-Cancer treatment

Keywords: Oral anticancer treatment, patient education