Oral Chemotherapy & Biotherapy: Effective Care and Support for Patients

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Background. Oral anti-cancer medications are increasingly a part of standard chemotherapy regimens. Clinicians and patients alike overwhelmingly prefer oral chemotherapy to traditional intravenous chemotherapy. However, the side effect profiles of oral chemotherapy agents are often just as severe as IV chemotherapy medications that are given under the close supervision of healthcare professionals. This leaves a significant ‘care gap’ for those taking oral chemotherapy as the development of evidence-based care standards has not kept pace with the increasing use of these medications.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to explore current practice to support patients taking oral chemotherapy at the BC Cancer Agency and to make specific recommendations for future practice based on current literature.

Methods. An electronic literature review utilizing the databases PubMed, CINAHL, and the Cochrane Library resulted in 140 identified peer-reviewed journal articles, of which 31 were deemed relevant and retrieved. Additionally, a qualitative cross sectional survey was administered to the regional nursing and pharmacy leaders of the six (6) Regional BC Cancer Agency Centers to gain understanding of current practice.

Findings. Models of care identified in the literature for patients receiving oral chemotherapy and biotherapy include: Nurse/Pharmacy led clinics, Automated Voice System Response, and Home Care Nursing. Inconsistent practice within nursing and pharmacy was identified across the Regional BC Cancer Centers. Recommendations based on findings include: Provision of patient/family centered education, increased support to patients throughout their first cycle of oral chemotherapy, and development of consistent protocols for nursing and pharmacy across the BC Cancer Agency.