

Palliative Chemotherapy: Keeping It From Being An 'Oxymoron'

Joanne McLeod, MD, CCFP
Clinical Associate Medical Oncology
Allan Blair Cancer Centre, Regina

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Support the role for chemotherapy in palliative care.
- ❖ Show how appropriate patient selection can improve both quantity and quality of life with chemotherapy in the palliative setting.
- ❖ Demonstrate through a case study how involvement of a Palliative care team can optimize the benefits of palliative chemotherapy.

The Role of Palliative Chemotherapy

- ❖ Changing the 'mind-set' regarding chemotherapy in cancer treatment: curative vs. palliative.
- ❖ Two goals of palliative chemotherapy: extend life (quantity) and alleviate symptoms (quality).
- ❖ Weighing the RISKS versus BENEFITS!
- ❖ Palliative care involvement in the monitoring and treatment of chemotherapy toxicities/side-effects.

Palliative Chemotherapy & Quality of Life

- ❖ Performance status and quality of life prior to chemotherapy.
- ❖ 4 important components impacting quality of life: physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. Need to be determined prior to chemotherapy and continued reassessment.
- ❖ Importance of ongoing assessment and follow-up especially with chemotherapy.

Palliative Chemotherapy: Risk Reduction

- ❖ Appropriate patient selection = performance status!
- ❖ Effective and knowledgeable patient and caregiver support. Palliative care team has a very important role!
- ❖ Knowledge of major side-effect/toxicities of chemotherapy and appropriate treatment (ie. Febrile neutropenia and sepsis).

Chemotherapy and Neutropenic Sepsis

- ❖ Neutropenic sepsis = oncologic emergency! Major cause of morbidity and mortality in patients on chemotherapy.
- ❖ Importance of early recognition of symptoms and signs of neutropenic sepsis (with or without fever).
- ❖ Treatment of this as an EMERGENCY even in palliative setting!

Palliative Chemotherapy: 'Making' a Case For It

Carolyn Johns: A Smile to Last a Lifetime



- ❖ ‘D-Day’...March 22, 2007
- ❖ Easter 2007 – HOPE in the form of palliative care!
- ❖ Living life with palliative chemotherapy “...and a little help from our friends.”



- ❖ Round 1 – April 2007 to August 2007
- ❖ Making the best of life.
- ❖ Saving the best Christmas gift to last! (December 2008)
- ❖ Rounds 2 to 4 – January to July 2009
- ❖ The right choice at its time – palliative care alone! (July to September 2009)
- ❖ Life up to the very end.



Carolyn Elaine Johns

May 15, 1963
to
September 25, 2009



“Everything will be all right in
the end...

If it's not all right
Then it's not the end.”

(Sonny in “The Best Exotic
Marigold Hotel”)

