

Journal watch
**Malignant Bowel Obstruction: Natural History of a Heterogeneous
Patient Population Followed Prospectively Over Two Years**

Presented by: Daniela Carli Buttenschoen, December 14th 2010

Reference:

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Abstract

Context. The management of malignant bowel obstruction (MBO) is often challenging and frequently involves multiple treatment modalities, including chemotherapy, surgery, stenting, and symptomatic medical management.

Objectives. To describe the natural history of patients diagnosed with MBO who were admitted to a tertiary level hospital and followed by a multidisciplinary team that included medical oncologists, surgical oncologists, and palliative care specialists.

Methods. Thirty-five patients admitted under medical or surgical oncology with a diagnosis of MBO were followed over a two-year period or until the time of death. Primary malignancies included colon, rectum, pancreas, biliary, breast, bladder, carcinoid, renal cell, gastric, lung, and melanoma. Clinical outcomes of interest included survival, percentage of patients receiving surgery and/or chemotherapy, total parenteral nutrition (TPN), insertion of venting gastrostomy tube, disposition, and rates of readmission to hospital.

Results. Median survival was 80 days and three patients were alive at the time of study closure. At our center, 34% of patients underwent surgical intervention, 37% received at least one dose of post-MBO chemotherapy, and 43% received TPN. There was a cohort of patients (17%) who were alive at one year.

Conclusion. Interventions such as chemotherapy and TPN may be appropriate in a carefully selected subgroup of patients. A collaborative approach is required for the optimal clinical management and palliation of MBO.

Strength: prospective study, well organized, long follow up period, describes a multidisciplinary clinical approach

Weakness: small study population, general information about location and extension of bowel obstruction was missing, surprisingly rare use of dexamethasone

Relevance to palliative care

Malignant bowel obstruction is a common symptom in palliative patients and information about indication of treatment options and outcome is needed for clinical decision-making.