Journal Watch

The Views and Practice of Oncologists Towards Nutritional Support in Patients Receiving Chemotherapy.

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Abstract

Malnutrition in patients with cancer is common and an adverse prognostic indicator. A questionnaire answered by 357 (72%) UK specialist oncological trainees suggests that they lack the ability to identify factors that place patients at risk from malnutrition. Major barriers to effective nutritional practice included lack of guidelines, knowledge and time.

Comments

<u>Strengths/uniqueness:</u>
Specialist oncology trainees had a high response rate to this survey and it was interesting in particular to see a group of health care professionals polled at the same stage of their training, so the results are not confounded by different ages or times since completing medical school.
Sadly, a large proportion of these doctors had little idea of even the minimal information required to assess nutritional status /risk, and when given the information, at least half did not know how to use it properly. 29% did not know that body weight must be normalized to the person's height (body mass index) to understand if the person is underweight, normal weight or overweight. 50% thought that weight loss was not a concern, unless it was in excess of 10%/month, a level considered severe by nutrition professionals.

<u>Weaknesses:</u>
Not a bad paper. It might have been useful to ask a few questions which might have identified why doctors variously got the survey questions right and wrong (i.e. # of hours of nutrition-related education in their training program).

<u>Relevance to Palliative Care:</u>
I would be inclined to speculate that the trainees in this survey would be unlikely to be different from any specialist medical trainees in other disciplines, including palliative care. This would lend itself to placing more emphasis on basic assessments: determination of height, weight, calculation of body mass index, as well as taking a weight loss history and correctly grading /staging weight loss.