Improving Adherence to Adjuvant Endocrine Therapy in Breast Cancer Through a Therapeutic Educational Approach: A Feasibility Study

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Purpose/Objectives: To develop and test the feasibility of a tailored therapeutic educational program, with the aim of improving adherence to oral endocrine adjuvant chemotherapy in women with breast cancer.

Design: A qualitative study to identify educational needs and a feasibility study assessing the efficacy of the program.

Setting: A comprehensive cancer center, the Lucien Neuwirth Cancer Institute in Saint-Priest-en-Jarez, France.

Sample: Two consecutive samples (N = 11, N = 6) of women taking adjuvant oral endocrine chemotherapy for breast cancer.

Methods: A mixed qualitative and quantitative method was used. The participants’ representations of disease and treatment were explored through one-on-one interviews and then translated into educational needs, which were used to develop a tailored therapeutic education program. The pilot study evaluated the reach and efficacy using before-and-after comparisons.

Main Research Variables: Educational objectives, knowledge, trust in the treatment, and anxiety.

Findings: Five educational objectives (acquiring knowledge, improving communication skills, managing anxiety, managing side effects, and improving adherence) were identified through 11 interviews. A three-session program was developed. Eight of the 23 patients invited to participate in a pilot study accepted, and six completed the intervention. Knowledge improved from 38.9 of 100 preintervention to 69.4 of 100 postintervention (p = 0.045). Trust in treatment showed a trend to improvement from 5.5 of 10 to 8 of 10 (p = 0.14), but anxiety did not change significantly; anxiety went from 6 to 7 (p = 0.88).

Conclusions: Results from the feasibility study showed promising efficacy for the educational objectives and provided information about how the program could be improved. Implications for Nursing: Tailored educational programs conducted by trained nurses may help patients to adhere to and live with the effects of endocrine therapy.

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adjuvant endocrine therapy is the standard treatment recommended for women with hormone receptor–positive early breast cancer (American Cancer Society & National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2006). The aim of this therapy is to prevent disease recurrence and improve overall survival (Baum et al., 2002; Coates et al., 2007; Cuzick et al., 2010; Early Breast Cancer Trialists’ Collaborative Group, 1998). This therapy is given to 60% of all women diagnosed with early breast cancer, representing a substantial number of women who receive long-term oral treatment.

Although adjuvant endocrine therapy has many potential benefits, it can also lead to side effects (e.g., menopausal symptoms, arthralgia, weight gain, osteoporosis), which may have a greater impact on women’s quality of life.