Prevalence, Duration, Severity, and Distress of Chemotherapy-Related Gastrointestinal Symptoms in Patients With a Hematologic Malignancy

Catherine Cherwin, PhD, RN, and Kristine Kwekkeboom, PhD, RN

Chemotherapy is associated with side effects of varying prevalence, duration, severity, and distress, many of which are gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms. Evidence has shown that chemotherapy directly affects GI cell replacement within a few hours after administration (Mitchell, 2006). Perhaps the most well-known and well-studied GI symptoms in patients with cancer are nausea and vomiting. In the past five years, about 10,000 articles have been published concerning chemotherapy-related nausea and/or vomiting. However, chemotherapy is known to cause as many as 19 GI symptoms, including anticipatory nausea, anticipatory vomiting, dysphagia, eructation, xerostomia, oral mucositis, dysgeusia, anorexia, retching, nausea, vomiting, pyrosis, early satiety, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, rectal itching, rectal burning, and flatulence (Cherwin, 2012). Patients with a hematologic malignancy are at particular risk for GI symptoms because of the high doses of chemotherapy needed to produce an effect on cancer cells in the blood, lymphatic tissue, and bone marrow (Camp-Sorrell, 2010). Few studies of chemotherapy-related symptoms focus exclusively on...