

The Effect of Aromatherapy on Insomnia and Other Common Symptoms Among Patients With Acute Leukemia

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Purpose/Objectives: To determine if the use of aromatherapy improves insomnia and other common symptoms in hospitalized patients with newly diagnosed acute leukemia.

Design: A randomized, crossover, washout trial.

Setting: An inpatient acute leukemia unit at the Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard L. Solove Research Institute of the Wexner Medical Center at Ohio State University in Columbus.

Sample: 50 patients who were newly diagnosed with acute leukemia and hospitalized to receive their initial four weeks of intensive induction chemotherapy.

Methods: Patients were offered a choice of three scents to be used during the trial: lavender, peppermint, or chamomile. Each patient was randomized to receive either the chosen aromatherapy intervention or a placebo intervention during alternate weeks, with a washout period in between. Sleep quality and other common symptoms were measured.

Main Research Variables: Aromatherapy, sleep, insomnia, pain, tiredness, drowsiness, nausea, lack of appetite, shortness of breath, depression, anxiety, and well-being.

Findings: Most patients reported poor quality sleep at baseline, but aromatherapy had a statistically significant positive impact. Improvements were noted in tiredness, drowsiness, lack of appetite, depression, anxiety, and well-being because of aromatherapy.

Conclusions: Aromatherapy is a viable intervention for improving insomnia and other symptoms commonly experienced by patients with acute leukemia.

Implications for Nursing: Oncology nurses can employ aromatherapy safely and inexpensively, and with minimal training, as an effective tool in decreasing many symptoms that plague patients with leukemia. Patients can exercise a greater sense of control over their treatment environments through the use of aromatherapy.

Chemotherapy is the mainstay of treatment for acute leukemia. Although chemotherapy can have positive effects on the disease, it often is accompanied by many severe symptoms. Debilitating symptoms can be experienced from the disease itself or from its treatment. Individuals with cancer rarely suffer from just one symptom at a time, but rather are faced with symptom clusters, particularly during chemotherapy (Klafke et al., 2016). These symptoms can greatly affect patients' quality of life. Supportive therapies are an integral part of oncology care, and although this science has seen much advancement, optimal symptom management remains elusive for some patients.

Complementary therapies, such as relaxation, guided imagery, massage, and aromatherapy, are now widely used by patients with cancer (Stringer & Donald,