



# Empowering Individuals to Self-Manage Chemotherapy Side Effects

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Providing concise, consistent, and individually relevant patient education is critical. At one institution, patients and families attended a chemotherapy education class consisting of an 11-minute DVD and an oncology nurse–facilitated group discussion. Postclass and eight-week follow-up surveys assessing understanding of treatment side effects, self-care management, and confidence in managing side effects were administered. Quantitative and qualitative data suggested the DVD and oncology nurse–facilitated group discussion provided consistent information, flexibility, and expert knowledge in empowering patients and families to self-manage chemotherapy side effects.

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Educating patients about chemotherapy and its side effects is standard practice throughout most cancer centers and is recognized as an Oncology Nursing Society standard of care (Neuss et al., 2013). Instructing patients on side-effect management and behavioral strategies can decrease health-related distress, increase coping, reduce anxiety, and promote self-care (Kinnane & Thompson, 2008; Lorig et al., 1999; Williams & Schreier, 2005).

Although information about chemotherapy is widely accepted as being useful for patients with cancer, differences exist in location, timing, and who provides the information (Gonzalez & Stepan, 2006; Lock & Willson, 2002; Piredda et al., 2008). Three opportunities are present at the authors' institution for patients to learn about their chemotherapy treatment. One is the

outpatient chemotherapy unit, where the patient is provided one-on-one instruction on the day of treatment by an outpatient chemotherapy infusion nurse at any time during their infusion therapy appointment. Patients also may receive one-on-one instruction from an inpatient hematology/oncology nurse on the day of treatment. In addition, the patient may receive information from the Cancer Education Center (CEC) in the form of a biweekly class provided by oncology nurse educators in the outpatient setting.

Before the development of the oncology nurse–led class featuring a DVD and group discussion, oncology nurse educators within the CEC had been providing a general chemotherapy class entitled *What You Need to Know About Chemotherapy*. The original class delivery method consisted of a 60–80 minute pre-

sentation. Supplemental National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society brochures regarding chemotherapy and side-effect management were available. Although teaching materials were available for staff to use, no coordinated curriculum existed.

Noting the differences in educators' teaching styles, a task force of oncology nurses, educators, physicians, and patient advocates was established to develop a single, evidence-based chemotherapy curriculum focusing on key messages and self-care strategies for side effects. The topics addressed included managing blood counts (red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets), mouth sores, constipation, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, taste and appetite changes, fatigue, peripheral neuropathy, hair loss, sexual relationships, emotional changes, and the resources available at the cancer center. Those topics served as content for developing the 11-minute DVD using lecture slides with voiceover. Health literacy and media experts from the departments of patient education and media support services at the Mayo Clinic were involved in the production of the DVD. Those departments were responsible for ensuring institutional standards were achieved.

Specific goals for the new curriculum included (a) identifying key messages; (b) providing consistent, evidence-based information; (c) providing opportunities for reinforcement; (d) ensuring health literacy needs were met; and (e) facilitating discussion and involvement of patients and caregivers (e.g., family, significant others, friends). The aim of the study was to receive feedback from individuals regarding the coordinated curriculum and whether it met the goals.