

Community Oncology Service

Malignant Neoplasms have been the leading cause of death in Hong Kong. It accounts for 30% of death in 2010 [1]. So, don't complain when you are doing a lot of cytotoxic drug reconstitution every day. We really have a lot of cancer patients!!! Of course, we are not just addressing the need for reconstituting drugs for them. With the high standard of service of Hospital Authority, we are now developing clinical oncology pharmacy service too.

Clinical oncology pharmacy service is not only meeting the need of the growing population of cancer patient, but also echoing the need of higher quality of service to handle the complicated chemotherapy regimen for our patients, doctors and nurses. The treatment of choice is expanding rapidly especially after the invention of "mab" – monoclonal antibody. The life expectancy of some incurable cancers extended drastically which in turns, we have more patients living with incurable cancers.

With the advancing of oral chemotherapeutic agents and development of out-patient day chemo centre, our patients are now residing in the community but not staying at the hospital as old days. This is certainly a good move to keep patients at home, to preserve their quality of life and precious time with family. In fact, the quality of life will not fall immediately right after the diagnosis of incurable cancer; instead, their quality of life tends to be well preserved until the "terminal" "terminal" stage of their lives.

Changing the concept in facing the incurable cancers is therefore the main theme of this workshop. Quite a lot of time, as seen on TV, people will ask the doctor how long they can live, finish their last goal and do nothing but sit there to wait for the father god to take them. In the meantime, they will keep thinking how terrible the heaven (or hell) will be, how painful the tumor will be. Their quality of life will then be eroded by these negative thoughts cause they are not doing anything to keep them from staying healthy but just wasting the precious last moment with their beloved.

These series of workshops are hosted by social workers from cancerlink support centre of the Hong Kong Cancer Fund. Patients with incurable cancers or their care-givers will be recruited to join the workshop. Dr. Rico Liu, the oncologist from the Queen Mary Hospital, will firstly give a talk about positive concept towards incurable cancers. Miss Connie Lam, the palliative nurse from Ruttonjee Hospital, will then talk about some self care issue about maintaining the well-being in patients with incurable cancer. Dr. Keary Zhou, pharmacy instructor from CUHK, and I, will take



part in pain management and talk about patient expectation on pain medications.

The workshop will then end with an open discussion of the patients' understanding of the topic. They will ask some disease related questions or something about their drugs. Sometimes, there was really sad time when they talked about the uncertainty of their life expectancy or some painful experience on their disease management through chemotherapy or radiotherapy. But I am also glad to be there to share their sad moments and being part of the team to show them the right attitudes to face the dreadful disease.

The beauty of the workshop is all about concept and expectation but not individual patient counseling, because we don't really have the history and profile of the patients and we are not serving as we are working in the hospital. Teaching them concept on facing the terrible disease could definitely benefit them more because I truly believe in the power of knowledge and their ability of self care which probably go in line with the community shift in oncology care.

Last but not least, may I take this opportunity to thank cancerlink, Dr. Rico Liu and Miss Connie Lam for inviting us to join the team in community oncology patient care? If any pharmacist folks would like to join us, just drop me a line. We are more than happy to have more colleagues to join us.

References

1. Vital statistics from center for health protection of the Department of Health. Website retrieved on June 6, 2011. <http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/data/4/10/27/380.html>

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