

Antiemetic Therapy in Patients Receiving Cancer Chemotherapy

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Purpose/Objectives: To examine the currently available antiemetic medications and review their uses in the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (N&V).

Data Sources: Published articles and book chapters.

Data Synthesis: N&V is a common yet potentially serious side effect of chemotherapy. Nurses must understand the physiology of N&V, its impact on patients, and the proper use of antiemetic medications to effectively manage this problem. Antiemetic medications vary in mechanism of action, indications for use, and adverse effects.

Conclusions: Nurses are in a position to identify patients who are at risk for N&V and to manage their care using accepted practice guidelines.

Implications for Nursing: Although practice guidelines have been established, the nurse's role in assessment and implementation of care is critical in the prevention and management of chemotherapy-induced N&V.

Key Points . . .

- Nausea and vomiting (N&V) is one of the most distressing and potentially serious side effects of chemotherapy, with physical, psychological, emotional, and treatment-related consequences.
- N&V may be classified as anticipatory, acute, delayed, or persistent; each category requires a different approach to treatment.
- Because N&V can be triggered by multiple pathways, selection of the most appropriate antiemetic medication and route of administration is extremely important.
- Nurses are in a unique position to assess the potential for N&V, its effects on patients, and the effectiveness of antiemetic therapy.

Nausea and vomiting (N&V) is one of the most distressing and potentially serious side effects of chemotherapy. Without antiemetic therapy, 60%–80% of patients receiving chemotherapy experience significant N&V. Despite advances in the understanding and treatment of chemotherapy-induced N&V, approximately 40%–60% of patients continue to experience this side effect (Bender et al., 2002; Eckert, 2001).

The goal of antiemetic therapy is to prevent or reduce the incidence and intensity of N&V related to chemotherapy. However, research indicates that N&V often is underassessed by oncologists and oncology nurses (Bender et al., 2002). Although newer antiemetic medications are far more effective than previous generations of drugs, these medications do not work for all patients. Once an antiemetic regimen has been prescribed, many practitioners assume that patients' N&V has been relieved; this may prevent practitioners from gaining a true understanding of the incidence and impact that this condition has on patients receiving cancer chemotherapy.

The use of complementary and alternative treatments for chemotherapy-induced N&V has received much attention during the past decade; however, a discussion of these modalities is beyond the scope of this article.

Goal for CE Enrollees:

To further enhance nurses' knowledge regarding antiemetic therapy in patients receiving cancer chemotherapy.

Objectives for CE Enrollees:

On completion of this CE, the participant will be able to

1. Describe the risk factors and the four classifications of nausea and vomiting with chemotherapy.
2. Discuss the treatment options available for nausea and vomiting with chemotherapy.
3. Discuss the nursing implications in the care of patients who experience nausea and vomiting with chemotherapy.

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