

Glioblastoma Multiforme: Enhancing Survival and Quality of Life

Mary Elizabeth Davis, RN, MSN, AOCNS[®], and Ann Marie Mulligan Stoiber, RN, BSN, OCN[®]

A diagnosis of a malignant brain tumor is devastating to patients and their families. The patients' inevitable loss of independence, which can occur suddenly or gradually, is tragic, and the eventual complete dependence can be overwhelming to the family and caregivers. Glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) is the most common type of primary malignant brain tumor in adults and is associated with a disproportionately high mortality rate. The highly malignant tumor grows rapidly and has a tendency to recur through treatment. The brain itself presents a multitude of barriers to treatment, such as tumor location, accessibility for surgery, and the blood-brain barrier's natural protection. Despite access to optimal multimodality treatment, patients diagnosed with GBM have a low survival rate. Patients and families need emotional and practical support throughout the continuum of this devastating disease. Astute neurologic assessment skills and immediate and appropriate interventions are required to maintain the patient's functional status. This article provides an overview of the treatment of GBM and reviews how oncology nurses can intervene to positively improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

An estimated 64,530 new cases of primary brain tumors will be diagnosed in 2011. Of these, about 24,070 are estimated to be malignant (Central Brain Tumor Registry of the United States, 2011). Brain tumors are quite rare when compared to other malignant tumors, accounting for about 1% of all primary cancers; however, they are associated with a disproportionately high mortality rate of about 2% of all cancer deaths (Lobera, 2009).

Gliomas arise from glial cells that surround and support neurons. Gliomas are graded based on the World Health Organization's system, which is based on cellular characteristics (Louis, Ohgaki, Wiestler, & Cavenee, 2007). The tumor-node-metastasis (TNM) staging system is not relevant to gliomas because these tumors rarely metastasize to lymph nodes or other distant locations outside of the central nervous system. Grading determines the degree of malignancy or aggressiveness of the tumor. In the World Health Organization's system, glioblastomas are grade IV gliomas, the most malignant and aggressive of all brain tumors (Louis et al., 2007) (see Table 1).

At a Glance

- ◆ Glioblastoma multiforme is a rare cancer with a poor prognosis.
- ◆ Treatment is multimodal, using surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and targeted therapies, with the overall goal of extending survival while maintaining quality of life.
- ◆ Nursing interventions designed to address the unique supportive care needs of this population can positively impact patients and their families.

Clinical Presentation

Clinical presentation of glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) varies depending on the location of the tumor and the anatomic structures of the involved brain (Lobera, 2009). The most common symptoms at presentation are headache, seizure, motor weakness, and progressive neurologic deficit (Brandes et al., 2008). These symptoms typically develop over days

Mary Elizabeth Davis, RN, MSN, AOCNS[®], is a clinical nurse specialist in the Department of Ambulatory Nursing, and Ann Marie Mulligan Stoiber, RN, BSN, OCN[®], is a clinical nurse IV in the Department of Neurology, both at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, NY. Davis is a member of Genentech's Nursing Advisory Board for Nursing and Patient Education Materials. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the independent peer reviewers or editorial staff. Mention of specific products and opinions related to those products do not indicate or imply endorsement by the *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing* or the Oncology Nursing Society. (Submitted July 2010. Revision submitted September 2010. Accepted for publication October 3, 2010.)

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