Oral Agents for Cancer: Safety Challenges and Recommendations

Theresa Rudnitzki, MS, RN, ACNS-BC, AOCNS®, and Diana McMahon, MSN, RN, OCN®

Background: The lack of knowledge and standardization of safety practices related to prescribing, dispensing, administering, and monitoring oral agents for cancer (OACs) has created significant safety challenges for patients and healthcare providers. Problems identified with the use of OACs include possible medication errors, increased potential for toxicity, unintentional exposure of hazardous medications to healthcare providers and informal caregivers, and possible pollution of the environment.

Objectives: The purpose of this review is to provide information about the current state of knowledge and recommendations in the literature regarding safety concerns with OACs and strategies for risk reduction.

Methods: Articles published from 2003–2014 were retrieved using PubMed, CINAHL®, and the Cochrane Library.

Findings: As the number of OACs continues to increase, existing standards related to medication errors and safety will require ongoing revision to lessen the risks and hazards for patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers.

The lack of knowledge and standardization of safety practices related to prescribing, dispensing, administering, and monitoring oral agents for cancer (OACs) has created significant safety challenges for patients and healthcare providers. Problems identified with the use of OACs include possible medication errors, increased potential for toxicity, unintentional exposure of hazardous medications to healthcare providers and informal caregivers, and possible pollution of the environment.

The purpose of this review is to provide information about the current state of knowledge and recommendations in the literature regarding safety concerns with OACs and strategies for risk reduction.

As the number of OACs continues to increase, existing standards related to medication errors and safety will require ongoing revision to lessen the risks and hazards for patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers.