Chemotherapy Extravasations: Prevention, Identification, Management, and Documentation

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The nurses’ role in safe and effective practice of chemotherapy administration is paramount. The purpose of this article is to present nurses administering chemotherapy with evidence-based information useful in eliminating or reducing the severity of an injury from a chemotherapy extravasation. Nurse education is essential to prevent, recognize, manage, and document chemotherapy extravasations. The classification of the cytotoxic drug and its mechanism of action is useful when selecting the IV access device and also will direct the nurse’s intervention to manage the injury. The Oncology Nursing Society’s Chemotherapy and Biotherapy Guidelines and Recommendations for Practice and the drug manufacturer are the best sources offering pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic recommendations. The nurse’s best ally in the prevention, prompt recognition, and management of an extravasation is the educated patient. Documenting chemotherapy extravasation is another important step to guide the treatment plan; therefore, the document must provide complete details and the extent of the event.

A 67-year-old male with non-small cell lung cancer receiving docetaxel via peripheral infusion in the outpatient clinic suffered an extravasation. The nurse caring for him noticed inflammation around the peripheral site, prompting her to stop the infusion and notify the advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP). The IV catheter from the peripheral site was removed and cool packs were applied to the site. The patient was discharged from the clinic with instructions from the ARNP to apply cool compresses for 15–20 minutes four times daily for the next 48–72 hours. By the third day, the patient’s hand had become erythematous and painful. The ARNP prescribed Vicodin®, is a nurse at Florida Cancer Specialists in Bradenton. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article. The author 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 author, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. Mention of specific products and opinions related to those products do not indicate or imply endorsement by the Oncology Nursing Society's Nursing or the Oncology Nursing Society. Gonzalez can be reached at tulig7@yahoo.com, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org. (First submission April 2012. Revision submitted July 2012. Accepted for publication July 23, 2012.)

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