Sexuality, Menopausal Symptoms, and Quality of Life in Premenopausal Women in the First Year Following Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation

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Purpose/Objectives: To describe sexuality, menopausal symptoms, and quality of life (QOL) in premenopausal women in the first year following hematopoietic cell transplantation (HCT).

Design: One-year prospective longitudinal study.

Setting: Stanford University Medical Center in California.

Sample: 63 premenopausal female recipients of HCT with a mean age of 34.5 years.

Methods: Three instruments were used: Female Sexual Function Index, Menopause-Specific QOL Questionnaire, and a visual analog scale to measure QOL.

Main Research Variables: Sexuality, menopausal symptoms, and QOL.

Findings: At one year post-HCT, women reported absent to low desire and arousal, adequate lubrication less than half of the time, absent or rare orgasm, pain during vaginal penetration more than half the time, and dissatisfaction with overall sex life. Women also reported moderate to severe vasomotor symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, and sweating. Twenty-one women were avoiding sexual activity, and 25 women were not sexually active. Mean QOL scores significantly increased (p = 0.028) in the first year, signifying an improvement in QOL. Variables predictive of improved QOL at one year post-HCT include decreased psychosocial and physical symptoms, sexual satisfaction, and pre-HCT QOL score.

Conclusions: One year post-HCT, women reported sexual dysfunction, sexual dissatisfaction, and menopausal symptoms, which negatively affect QOL.

Implications for Nursing: Nurses and other healthcare providers working with recipients of HCT can provide anticipatory guidance on potential changes in sexuality and menopausal symptoms to facilitate adaptation by reducing discordance between expectations and new realities.

Key Words: hematopoietic cell transplantation; sexuality; menopause; quality of life

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