Oncology Nursing in a New Era: Optimizing Treatment With Bevacizumab

Joyce Marrs, MS, FNP-BC, AOCNP®, and Beth A. Zubal, RN, MS, AOCNP®, FNP-BC

Overexpression of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) by tumor cells promotes angiogenesis, which correlates with progressive tumor growth and poor outcomes in many types of cancer. Bevacizumab inhibits VEGF to promote regression of tumor vessels by limiting blood supply and tumor growth, enhancing delivery of chemotherapy, and inhibiting formation of new vessels. Combined with chemotherapy, bevacizumab prolongs progression-free and overall survival over chemotherapy alone in patients with metastatic carcinoma of the colon and rectum; unresectable, locally advanced, recurrent or metastatic non-squamous, non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC); and metastatic HER2-negative breast cancers (mBC). Side effects, including hypertension, proteinuria, bleeding, arterial thrombotic events, and impaired wound healing, can be clinically significant, particularly in patients with risk factors. To optimize patient outcomes, nurses should understand bevacizumab’s role in cancer therapy, recognize symptoms of toxicity, and manage its side effects. This article describes the rationale for bevacizumab in the treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer, NSCLC, and mBC and discusses patient selection, treatment duration, and side-effect management to support the role of oncology nurses in caring for, educating, and enhancing treatment adherence among patients with cancer receiving bevacizumab. Two case studies are presented as examples of the complex scenarios nurses may encounter regarding these issues.

At a Glance

- Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) overexpression contributes to continued tumor growth and metastases. Bevacizumab blocks VEGF to limit tumor growth and enhance chemotherapy delivery to the site.
- Clinical studies support the continued administration of bevacizumab during change in chemotherapy regimen from intolerance, at disease progression, and beyond disease progression for patients in whom a potential clinical benefit is identified.
- Because patients with certain underlying comorbidities may have a higher risk of side effects, oncology nurses should complete a thorough assessment to identify potential factors to be considered and discussed with patients before proceeding with bevacizumab treatment.