Chemotherapy Follow-Up in Older Adults:
Results of a Quality-Improvement Project

Mary Pat Lynch, CRNP, MSN, AOCN®, Dana Marcone, MSW, LSW, and Jennifer King, RN, BSN, OCN®

Caring for older adults with cancer receiving chemotherapy may present a number of challenges. Complications from chemotherapy are more common among older patients, and prevention and early detection of toxicities can improve treatment adherence, decrease costs, and improve treatment outcomes in this population. Over 12 months, 18 older adults with cancer (aged 65 years or older) participated in a quality-improvement project that provided telephone follow-up and intervention after chemotherapy administration; first-time chemotherapy recipients received telephone calls that followed assessment and referral guidelines over 10 days. Several characteristics of patients with increased toxicity were noted, including poor functional status, limited support at home, and significant comorbid disease. Recommendations for identifying patients at high risk are included so that services may be targeted for the most appropriate use of resources.

At a Glance

- Older adults receiving treatment for cancer are at increased risk for developing toxicities related to chemotherapy; prompt recognition and treatment of the toxicities are crucial for optimal outcomes.
- Older adults may not report chemotherapy-related toxicity to their treatment team appropriately.
- Proactive telephone follow-up may help manage side effects early and improve treatment outcomes.

At Pennsylvania Oncology, Hematology Associates, all in Philadelphia.

Dana Marcone, MSW, LSW, is a geriatric oncology social work specialist, both in the Joan Karnell Cancer Center at Pennsylvania Hospital; and Jennifer King, RN, BSN, OCN®, is a chemotherapy-certified oncology nurse at Pennsylvania Oncology, Hematology Associates, all in Philadelphia. (First submission November 2009. Revision submitted February 2010. Accepted for publication February 9, 2010.)