Bowel Obstruction and Delirium: Managing Difficult Symptoms at the End of Life

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Palliative care has become an essential component of oncology care, with a focus on maximizing quality of life and optimizing function, as well as promoting pain and symptom management. This article focuses on the care of a patient experiencing bowel obstruction and delirium, two common issues in patients with advanced cancer, and demonstrates the integration of palliative care and oncology care to achieve an individualized care plan. Management focuses on identifying and treating reversible causes and improving quality of life while respecting the patient’s values and goals. Sometimes the causes are not easily identified or treatment of the cause may impair quality of life, at least temporarily. At other times, the causes may be irreversible and the focus is exclusively on quality of life. Determination of best care for individual patients requires synthesis of data from holistic assessment, including the patient’s goals of care and values, as well as knowledge of the patient’s disease state with evidence-based approaches to management.