Nonpharmacologic Interventions for Breathlessness in Advanced Stages of Malignant and Nonmalignant Diseases

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Objective

To assess the effectiveness of nonpharmacologic and noninvasive interventions for relieving breathlessness in patients with advanced stages of disease.

Type of Review

An intervention review to assess the benefits of the intervention used in health care.

Relevance for Nursing

Breathlessness is a common and distressing symptom for patients in the advanced stages of diseases, particularly with lung cancer, motor neuron disease, and chronic lung and heart diseases. Pharmacologic interventions alone often are not able to relieve breathlessness. Therefore, nurses should be updated on the best practice related to nonpharmacologic interventions in managing the symptoms effectively for providing comfort.

Summary of Key Evidence

Strong evidence exists that neuro-electrical muscle stimulation and chest wall vibration relieve breathlessness. Moderate evidence exists that use of walking aids and breathing training relieve breathlessness. Little evidence exists that acupuncture or acupressure relieves breathlessness. No significant evidence was found to support the use of music to relieve breathlessness. Finally, insufficient evidence exists to evaluate the effectiveness of relaxation, fans, counseling and support with and without breathing-relaxation training, case management, and psychotherapy in managing breathlessness.

Practice Recommendations

Neuro-electrical muscle stimulation, chest wall vibration, use of walking aids, and breathing training are recommended to manage breathlessness among patients with advanced-stage disease.

Research Recommendations

A high-quality research design with adequate sample size and power calculation is needed to establish the effectiveness of nonpharmacology and noninvasive intervention for managing breathlessness in the palliative-care setting.

Qualitative research study is needed to explore patients and caregivers’ acceptance and feasibility to the type of intervention used.

Bibliography