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Importance Of Comprehensive Supportive Care In Head And Neck Cancer Patients

1. Dr Dibyendu Roy, 2. Dr Soumyashree Samnataray 3. Dr Ankita Patel, 4. Dr Gaurav Goswami, 5. Dr Neha Gupta, 6. Dr Subohi Jafar 7. Dr Deepak Kumar Singh

1. Cancer Rehab Therapist, 2. Occupational Therapist 3,4,5,6 Radiation Oncologist 7. Surgical Oncologist

Institution: Apex Hospital, Varanasi (Oncology Department)

Abstract:

Comprehensive supportive care is essential for head and neck cancer patients to address the diverse physical, emotional, and practical challenges they face throughout their cancer journey. By providing holistic care that addresses the individual needs of patients; supportive care teams contribute significantly to improving outcomes and enhancing the overall quality of life for patients and their families.

Introduction:

In Dysphagia management, "Thicken Up" or similar thickening agents play a crucial role in modifying the consistency of liquids to make them safer for individuals with swallowing difficulties. Dysphagia refers to difficulty swallowing, which can be caused by various medical conditions such as stroke, neurological disorders, or structural issues in the throat or Oesophagus.

Our experience with using thickening agents like Thicken Up during radiation therapy for dysphagia has yielded positive results for patients. Radiation therapy, particularly when directed at head and neck areas, can often lead to swallowing difficulties due to tissue damage and inflammation which is known as Oral Mucositis. Managing dysphagia during radiation therapy is crucial for maintaining proper nutrition, hydration, over all treatment time (OTT) and overall quality of life for patients.

The positive outcomes we have observed attributed to several factors:

1. **Improved Safety:** Thickened liquids reduce the risk of aspiration during swallowing, which is especially important for patients undergoing radiation therapy who may already be experiencing swallowing difficulties due to treatment-related side effects.
2. **Enhanced Swallowing Efficiency:** By modifying the consistency of liquids to match the patient's swallowing abilities, thickening agents help improve swallowing efficiency, reducing the likelihood of choking or discomfort.

3. **Nutritional Support:** Thickened liquids allow patients to maintain adequate hydration and nutrition despite swallowing difficulties, which is essential for supporting the body's healing process during radiation therapy.
4. **Comfort and Compliance:** Patients may find thickened liquids more comfortable to swallow compared to thin liquids, leading to improved compliance with dietary recommendations and better overall satisfaction with their diet during treatment.
5. **Reduced Treatment Interruptions:** Effective dysphagia management with thickened liquids may help reduce treatment interruptions and ensure patients can continue with their radiation therapy without complications related to swallowing difficulties.

Method:

We have conducted this study with 100 patients suffering from Ca Buccal Mucosa and undergoing Chemo Radiation Therapy. 75 patients were in Experimental group and 25 patients in Controlled Group. We have applied Extra oral and intra oral Photobiomodulation and intra oral Cryotherapy, 5 days a week to the Experimental group and Controlled group only continued Chemo Radiation Therapy. We have directed all the patients to have Thicken up agents from the day 12-13 days of Radiation Therapy when they have developed Grade 1 Oral mucositis.

Result:

Combining Photobiomodulation (PBM) and Cryotherapy, Swallowing Maneuvers with thickened agents for patients undergoing chemo-radiation therapy for carcinoma of the Buccal mucosa is a comprehensive approach aimed at addressing both the underlying cancer treatment and the associated side effects, particularly Oral Mucositis and dysphagia.

- **Synergistic Effects:** By combining PBM, Cryotherapy, and thickened agents, we have observed synergistic effects in managing oral mucositis and dysphagia. PBM and Cryotherapy likely helped alleviate inflammation, pain, and tissue damage, while thickened agents provided additional support in managing dysphagia and ensuring safe swallowing.
- **Early Intervention for Dysphagia:** Initiating the use of thickened agents at the onset of Grade 1 mucositis (around days 12-13 of radiation therapy) is a proactive approach to addressing dysphagia before it progresses to more severe levels. Early intervention have helped prevent worsening dysphagia symptoms and improved overall swallowing function for patients in both the experimental groups.
- **Improved Compliance and Tolerance:** Providing supportive care interventions such as PBM, cryotherapy, and thickened agents alongside chemo-radiation therapy may have enhanced patients' tolerance to treatment and compliance with dietary recommendations. Managing side effects like Oral Mucositis and Dysphagia effectively can positively impact patients' overall treatment experience and willingness to adhere to their prescribed regimen.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** The combination of interventions used in the study likely contributed to improvements in patients' quality of life by reducing treatment-related side effects and maintaining functional abilities such as swallowing. Patients have experienced less discomfort, pain, and functional impairment, leading to a better overall treatment experience.
- **Optimized Treatment Outcomes:** Effective management of Oral mucositis and dysphagia can be critical for optimizing treatment outcomes in patients undergoing chemo-radiation therapy for buccal mucosa

carcinoma. By addressing these side effects early and comprehensively, the study have positively impacted patients' ability to complete their treatment regimen and achieve favorable treatment outcomes.

- In contrast, the controlled group did not receive these interventions, leading to the development of more severe Oral mucositis Grade 3 and dysphagia requiring external feeding support.
- The controlled group's experience of more severe Oral mucositis and dysphagia necessitating enteral feeding via Ryles tube , have impacted treatment compliance and overall treatment outcomes. Enteral feeding can pose additional challenges and discomfort for patients, potentially affecting their willingness to continue with chemo-radiation therapy as prescribed.

Conclusion:

Early intervention with comprehensive supportive care interventions can significantly impact patients' treatment experience, symptom management, and overall treatment outcomes

****The Study Supported by *Nestle Health Science*****

Reference:

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