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Is early palliative care feasible in patients with Multiple Myeloma?

Josep Porta-Sales, MD, PhD, Maria Guerrero-Torrelles, RN, Deborah Moreno-Alonso, MD, Josep Sarra-Escarre, MD PhD, Victòria Clapés-Puig, MD, Jordi Trelis-Navarro, MD, Anna Sureda-Balarí, MD PhD, Alberto Fernández De Sevilla-Ribosa, MD PhD

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Abstract

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Context: Evidence for the benefits of early palliative care (EPC) in patients with solid tumors is strong, but EPC has received scant attention in hematological malignancies.

Objective: To assess the benefits of outpatient-based EPC for symptom control in patients with multiple myeloma.

Methods: Retrospective study of patients attending the Multiple Myeloma Palliative Care Clinic (MM-PAL) at our hospital in the year 2013 (February 1 - December 31).

The following symptoms were assessed at baseline and at three follow-up consultations using a numerical visual scale (NVS; 0= no symptoms; 10= worst possible): pain; anorexia; constipation; insomnia; nausea/vomiting; dyspnea; anxiety; and sadness.

Physical and emotional symptom burden scores were calculated. Pain interference with general activity, sleep, and mood was also evaluated.

Results: Sixty-seven patients were included. The proportion of patients reporting moderate-severe pain (NVS ≥ 5) decreased significantly from baseline to the final follow-up: Worst pain decreased from 57% to 18% ($P < 0.0001$) while Average pain fell from 24% to 2% ($P < 0.0001$). The percentage of patients reporting no pain interference increased significantly from baseline: general activity (52% vs. 82%; $P = 0.0001$); sleep (73% vs. 91%; $P = 0.01$); and mood (52% vs. 87.5%; $P = 0.0001$). Physical and emotional symptom burden also improved, with significantly fewer patients reporting depression (13% vs. 5%; $P = 0.001$). Most patients (86.6%) were alive and still attending the MM-PAL at study end.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that early palliative care is feasible in patients with multiple myeloma. Pain and other symptoms were well-controlled.

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