

Integrative Oncology for Palliative Care: Enhancing Symptom Management and Patient Comfort

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Introduction

Palliative care aims to improve the quality of life for patients with serious illnesses by addressing physical, emotional and psychological symptoms. Integrative oncology, which blends conventional cancer treatments with complementary approaches, offers a holistic model of care that can be particularly beneficial in the palliative setting. This article examines how integrative oncology can enhance symptom management and patient comfort in palliative care, offering a comprehensive review of the evidence supporting various complementary therapies. Integrative oncology involves the use of complementary therapies alongside conventional cancer treatments to support the overall well-being of patients. In palliative care, integrative oncology focuses on alleviating symptoms, reducing treatment-related side effects and improving the quality of life. By addressing the multifaceted needs of patients, integrative oncology provides a more comprehensive approach to symptom management [1,2].

Description

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine practice that involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the body to restore balance and alleviate symptoms. Research indicates that acupuncture can effectively manage symptoms such as pain, nausea and fatigue in cancer patients. In palliative care, acupuncture may be used to complement conventional pain management strategies and improve overall comfort. Acupuncture, a key component of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), involves the insertion of thin needles into specific points on the body to balance the flow of energy, or "Qi." This practice has been increasingly integrated into Western medicine, particularly in oncology and palliative care, to alleviate symptoms and improve quality of life for patients with cancer. This section reviews the role of acupuncture in integrative oncology and its application in palliative care settings [3]. Acupuncture is believed to work through multiple mechanisms. Acupuncture may stimulate the release of endorphins and other neurotransmitters that modulate pain and improve mood. The insertion of needles can enhance blood circulation and promote the healing process in targeted areas. Acupuncture may influence immune responses, potentially enhancing the body's ability to cope with illness.

In the context of oncology, acupuncture is used to address various symptoms and side effects associated with cancer and its treatments. Numerous studies have demonstrated that acupuncture can significantly reduce cancer-related pain. It is often used as an adjunct to conventional pain management strategies. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have found that acupuncture is effective in reducing pain intensity and improving pain relief in cancer patients. Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in managing

chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. It is particularly beneficial for patients who experience these symptoms despite conventional antiemetic treatments. Research indicates that acupuncture, especially when applied to the P6 (Neiguan) point on the wrist, can reduce the severity of nausea and vomiting. Cancer-related fatigue is a common and debilitating symptom. Acupuncture has been reported to help alleviate fatigue, improving patients' overall energy levels and quality of life. Studies suggest that acupuncture can reduce fatigue levels and enhance physical functioning in cancer patients. Beyond managing specific symptoms, acupuncture can contribute to overall well-being by addressing stress, anxiety and depression. Acupuncture has been shown to improve quality of life by enhancing emotional well-being and reducing stress in cancer patients.

Clinical implementation

Integrating acupuncture into palliative care involves several key considerations. A thorough assessment is essential to determine the suitability of acupuncture for individual patients, taking into account their overall health, cancer type and current treatments. Customized acupuncture protocols should be developed based on the patient's specific symptoms and needs. Treatment frequency and duration can vary depending on the condition being addressed. Coordination between acupuncturists and other healthcare providers ensures that acupuncture complements conventional treatments and does not interfere with standard care [4]. While acupuncture is generally considered safe, certain considerations must be addressed. Proper sterilization of needles and adherence to infection control practices are crucial to prevent complications. Although rare, acupuncture can interact with other treatments. Patients should inform their healthcare providers about all therapies they are receiving. Acupuncture may not be appropriate for all patients, particularly those with specific medical conditions or sensitivities. A careful evaluation is necessary.

Nutritional interventions play a crucial role in palliative care, as cancer and its treatments often lead to changes in appetite, weight loss and nutritional deficiencies. Integrative oncology emphasizes personalized nutrition plans that address the specific needs of patients. Evidence suggests that dietary modifications, such as increasing protein intake and managing dietary side effects, can enhance patient comfort and support overall well-being. Nutrition plays a critical role in the management of cancer and its treatments. In the context of integrative oncology and palliative care, nutritional interventions aim to support patients through symptom management, enhance treatment efficacy and improve overall quality of life. This section explores the role of nutrition in integrative oncology, focusing on its applications, benefits and challenges in palliative care settings [5,6].

Nutrition is fundamental in cancer care for several reasons. Cancer and its treatments can lead to weight loss, muscle wasting and malnutrition. Adequate nutrition helps maintain body weight, muscle mass and strength. Proper nutrition can improve patients' ability to tolerate treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation and reduce treatment-related side effects. A well-balanced diet supports the body's healing processes, boosts the immune system and promotes overall recovery. Effective implementation of nutritional interventions in palliative care involves. Developing personalized nutrition plans based on the patient's specific needs, preferences and symptoms. Coordinating with oncologists, dietitians and palliative care teams to ensure nutrition plans complement overall treatment goals. Regularly assessing patients' nutritional status and adjusting dietary recommendations as needed to address evolving symptoms and needs. Several challenges must be considered when integrating nutrition into palliative care. Patients may have complex nutritional needs due to the effects of cancer and its

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treatments, requiring tailored and flexible approaches. Individual preferences and tolerances must be considered to ensure adherence to nutritional recommendations. Limited access to specialized nutritional support or dietary supplements may affect the implementation of recommended interventions.

Conclusion

Integrative oncology represents a valuable approach to enhancing symptom management and patient comfort in palliative care. By combining conventional treatments with complementary therapies, healthcare providers can offer a more holistic model of care that addresses the physical, emotional and psychological needs of patients. Continued research and collaboration are essential to advancing the field and improving patient outcomes in palliative care. Herbal supplements are commonly used in integrative oncology to manage symptoms and support overall health. While some herbal remedies have demonstrated efficacy in reducing symptoms such as nausea and fatigue, it is crucial to evaluate their safety and interactions with conventional treatments. Integrative oncology involves a careful assessment of herbal supplements to ensure they complement rather than interfere with standard palliative care.

Integrative oncology in palliative care is supported by a growing body of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in improving patient outcomes. Studies have shown that complementary therapies can enhance symptom management, reduce side effects and improve overall quality of life. However, it is essential to approach integrative therapies with a rigorous, evidence-based perspective to ensure safety and efficacy.

While integrative oncology offers numerous benefits, there are challenges to consider. Integrating complementary therapies into palliative care requires collaboration between oncologists, palliative care providers and complementary therapy practitioners. Additionally, ensuring that patients receive evidence-based treatments and avoiding potential interactions with conventional therapies are critical considerations.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest by author.

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