Symptom Management
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Essential Elements of Symptom Management

• Ongoing assessment and evaluation
• Requires interdisciplinary teamwork
• Reimbursement concerns (affordable options)
• Research is needed

Coyne, 2007; Coyne et al., 2002
Symptoms and Suffering

- Symptoms create suffering and distress
- Psychosocial intervention is key to complement pharmacologic strategies
- Need for interdisciplinary care
Common Symptoms

• **Respiratory**
  – Dyspnea, cough

• **GI**
  – Anorexia, constipation, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting

• **General/Systemic**
  – Fatigue/weakness

• **Psychological**
  – Depression, anxiety, delirium/agitation/confusion
Dyspnea

- Distressing shortness of breath
- Associated diseases

Dudgeon, 2010
Causes of Dyspnea

- Major pulmonary causes
- Major cardiac causes
- Major neuromuscular causes
- Other causes
Assessment of Dyspnea

- Use subjective report
- Clinical assessment
  - Physical exam
  - Diagnostic tests

Dudgeon, 2010
Treatment of Dyspnea

• Treating symptoms or underlying cause

• Pharmacologic treatments
  – Opioids
  – Bronchodilators
  – Diuretics
  – Other

Clemens & Klaschik, 2007; Dudgeon, 2010; Jacobs, 2003
Treatment of Dyspnea

• Nonpharmacologic
  – Oxygen
  – Counseling
  – Pursed lip breathing
  – Energy conservation
  – Fans, elevation
  – Other

Dudgeon, 2010
Cough

• Common symptom in advanced disease
• Causes pain, fatigue, insomnia

Dudgeon, 2010; Estfan & LeGrand, 2004
Causes of Cough

• Assess underlying cause (e.g. infection, sinusitis, reflux)
• Assess type of cough
• Assess associated symptoms
• Diagnostic tests may be needed

Dudgeon, 2010
Pharmacologic Interventions for Cough

- Suppressants/expectorants
- Antibiotics
- Steroids
- Anticholinergics

Lingerfelt et al., 2007
Non-Pharmacologic Interventions for Cough

- Chest PT
- Humidifier
- Positioning
Constipation

• Infrequent passage of stool
• Frequent symptom in palliative care
• Prevention is key
Causes of Constipation

- Disease related (e.g. obstruction, hypercalcemia, neurologic, inactivity)
- Treatment related (e.g. opioids, other meds)
Assessment of Constipation

- Bowel history
- Abdominal assessment
- Rectal assessment
- Medication review

Economou, 2010
Treatment of Constipation

- Medications
- Dietary/fluids
- Other approaches

Berger et al., 2007; Economou, 2010
Diarrhea

- Frequent passage of loose, nonformed stool
- Effects (e.g. fatigue, caregiver burden, skin breakdown)
Causes of Diarrhea

• Disease related
• Malabsorption
• Concurrent diseases
• Psychological
• Treatment related
Assessment of Diarrhea

- Bowel history
- Medication review
- Infectious processes
Treatment of Diarrhea

- Treat underlying cause
- Dietary modifications
- Hydration
- Pharmacologic agents
Nausea and Vomiting

- Common in advanced disease
- Assessment of etiology is important
- Acute, anticipatory or delayed

Mannix, 2010
Causes of Nausea and Vomiting

- Physiological (GI, metabolic, CNS)
- Psychological
- Disease related
- Treatment related
- Other
Assessment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Physical exam
- History
- Lab values
Pharmacologic Treatment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Anticholinergics
- Antihistamines
- Steroids
- Prokinetic agents
- Other
Non-Drug Treatment of Nausea and Vomiting

- Distraction/relaxation
- Dietary
- Small/slow feeding
- Invasive therapies
Fatigue

- Subjective, multidimensional experience of exhaustion
- Commonly associated with many diseases
- Impacts all dimensions of QOL

Anderson et al., 2010; Ferrell et al., 1996
Causes of Fatigue

- Disease related
- Psychological
- Treatment related
Assessment of Fatigue

- Subjective
- Objective
- Laboratory data
Treatment of Fatigue

• Pharmacologic
• Nonpharmacologic (rest, energy conservation, involve PT/OT)

Anderson et al., 2010
Depression

• Ranges from sadness to suicidal
• Often unrecognized and undertreated
• Occurs in 25-77% of terminally ill
• Distinguish normal vs. abnormal
• Should not be dismissed

Pasacreta et al., 2010
Causes of Depression

- Disease related
- Psychological
- Medication related
- Treatment related
Assessment of Depression

- Situational factors/symptoms
- Previous psychiatric history
- Other factors (e.g. lack of support system, pain)

Pasacreta et al., 2010
Example Questions for Depression Assessment

• How have your spirits been lately?
• What do you see in your future?
• What is the biggest problem you are facing?

Pasacreta et al., 2010
Pharmacologic Interventions for Depression

- Antidepressants
- Stimulants
- Non-benzodiazepines
- Steroids
Non-Pharmacologic Interventions for Depression

- Promote autonomy
- Grief counseling
- Draw on strengths
- Use cognitive strategies
Anxiety

- Subjective feeling of apprehension
- Often without specific cause
- Categories of mild, moderate, severe
Causes of Anxiety

- Medications and substances
- Uncertainty

Pasacreta et al., 2010
Assessment of Anxiety

- Physical symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Questions for assessment

APA, 1994
Pharmacologic Interventions for Anxiety

- Antidepressants
- Benzodiazepines/anticonvulsants
- Neuroleptics
- Non-benzodiazepines
Non-pharmacologic Interventions for Anxiety

- Empathetic listening
- Assurance and support
- Concrete information/warning
- Relaxation/imagery
Key Nursing Roles

- Patient advocacy
- Assessment
- Pharmacologic treatments
- Non-pharmacologic treatments
- Patient/family teaching
Conclusion

- Multiple symptoms common
- Coordination of care with physicians and others
- Use drug and nondrug treatment
- Patient/family teaching and support
A Nurse's Touch