Assessing Patient Awareness and Resource Adequacy to Reduce the Risk of Foodborne Illness to Chemotherapy Patients

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Identifer: PM - 06 - 19

Introduction

Chemotherapy patients have an increased risk of foodborne illnesses due to immunosuppression. Cancer patients are reported to have a five-fold increased risk for development of listeriosis1. To minimize the risk of foodborne illness it is important that cancer patients consume foods prepared and cooked at home according to food safety recommendations and avoid risk associated food products. It is suggested that limited food safety information is available to chemotherapy patients in the UK and data on their food safety knowledge, practices and perceptions are lacking. To date, there has been no review, or evaluation of the availability and adequacy of UK food safety information accessible for chemotherapy patients and family caregivers.

Purpose

To evaluate the provision of food safety information available to UK chemotherapy patients to assess whether appropriate and informative and explore the food safety experiences and perceived importance of food safety among chemotherapy patient and family caregivers.

Methods

A mixed methods research approach was utilized:

- Online food-related patient information resources were obtained from National Health Service (NHS) chemotherapy providers in England, Scotland and Wales, the Department of Health (DoH) and identified through internet searches.

- Resources were reviewed for the inclusion of food safety information using a content analysis approach.

- In-depth interviews (n=15) were conducted with patients and family caregivers to establish the food related experiences of patients during treatment.

- Self-complete questionnaires (paper-based and online) were completed (n=172) by chemotherapy patients (70%) and family caregivers (30%). The questionnaires included questions on attitudes and self-reported practices regarding food safety during chemotherapy treatment.

Ethical approval was granted by the Cardiff School of Health Sciences Research and Ethics Committee. Project reference number: 0003-SREC-2011.

Funding

This work was supported by the Tenovus Cancer Care Innovation research grant (the 2014-2019), who provided financial support for the conduct of the research.

The funding source had no involvement in the study design, in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; and in the decision to submit the article for publication.

Publication

The findings from this study are published in: Evans EW, & Redmond EC. (2017) “A assessment of food safety information provision for UK chemotherapy patients to reduce the risk of foodborne infection.” Public Health. 153: 25-35.

Acknowledgments

The ZERO2FIVE research group appreciate the participation and contribution of patients and family caregivers in this study. The research group also wish to acknowledge the personal chemotherapy experiences of Prof. Louise Fielding (1958 – 2012) who recognized the need for food safety information during chemotherapy treatment.

References


Significance of study

Findings from this study have determined that:

- Although information is available, access to specific food safety information for patients and caregivers is limited, considerable gaps exist and information provided varies greatly between sources, most comprehensive sources of information were tailored for neutropenic patients.
- The risk of food borne illness was underestimated by patients and family caregivers than the risk associated with food safety information.
- Overall, weak positive attitudes were expressed towards the importance of food safety during chemotherapy treatment. Attitudes were significantly more positive among those that had received information and those that had had food safety experiences and perceptions.
- Failure to inform and enable patients to adequately implement food safety practices may result in potentially serious implications. Indeed, the provision of targeted food safety information to this group during treatment may reduce the risk of foodborne infection. Consequently, there is an identified need to design and develop a standardized and specifically targeted safe food intervention, using a patient-engaged approach for chemotherapy patients and family caregivers to reduce the risk of foodborne infection during chemotherapy treatment and safeguard patient wellbeing.